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THE BOOK OF RUSTEM

RETOLD FROM THE SHAH NAMEH OF FIRDAUSI

BY

E. M. WILMOT-BUXTON

AUTHOR OF "TOLD BY THE NORTHMEN"
"BRITAIN LONG AGO" ETC.

The songs they sing of Rustem
Fill all the past with light;
If truth be in their music,
He was a noble knight.

SIR FRANCIS H. DOYLE

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PREFACE

MOST of the boys and girls who read this book will, I expect, be familiar with the Stories of King Arthur which have already appeared in this series ; and they will also know, very probably, the stories from the Odyssey which make such stirring reading of the days of long ago. Now this book of Persian tales resembles these stories in one way. All three are what are called by grown-up people great " national epics " ; that is to say, they tell of the adventures of different heroes, all of whom performed very daring deeds in order to make their country great and glorious. The Persian book in which these particular stories first appeared is called the " Epic of the Kings." It is, just like the " Arthur " stories, a collection of legends all concerned with the different kings of Persia, their battles and their victories, the trouble they got into from time to time, and their wonderful escapes from perils of every kind. But the real hero of the book is Rustem, a splendid sort of fellow, of gigantic strength, who always appeared on the scene to rescue the king from disgrace and defeat just when matters seemed quite hopeless. Some of the stories are concerned with his seven labours, which remind us very closely of the Twelve Labours of Hercules. Indeed Rustem is very like Hercules in many ways, so much so that some people have thought that the legends of the great Greek hero

must have reached Persia, and been "nationalised," that is, that the people of that country liked to think he had once been their own countryman, and done those same deeds in their own country. Others, however, believe that every nation has its own ideal of a hero such as Rustem or Hercules or Alexander or Beowulf, against whom no earthly strength could prevail; and that, since the minds of men in all lands are very much alike, they invented the same kind of stories about him.

The stories of Rustem are also concerned with Rakush, his wonderful horse, whom boys will wish to have for their own; and in this respect they closely resemble the tales of Alexander and his steed Bucephalus, who took such a stirring part in his master's adventures.

Alexander had conquered Persia in former days, so that it is quite possible that legends of his renown have been worked into the story of Rustem and Rakush.

Then there is a very sad tale telling how, owing to a terrible mistake, the great Champion of Persia killed his beloved son Sohrab. This story has been told in verse by Matthew Arnold, who makes of it a very beautiful poem, portions of which have been quoted, and which I hope, when you have read the story, you will all want to read from beginning to end for yourselves. In some particulars I have followed the story as told by Arnold rather than the original version. Those of you who have read carefully the other stories in this series, taken from Greek and English literature, will perhaps like to notice the peculiar mark of Persian literature, which makes this, perhaps, different from the others, that is, the love its story-tellers have for bright colours, rich fabrics, sweet-smelling flowers, and glittering jewels. The imagination of the Eastern or Oriental races was wonderfully vivid

and glowing. It cared nothing for the sculpture that the Greeks loved so much, because it had no colour. Persia itself is, of course, a land of brilliant sunshine and startling contrast of light and shade, and this has evidently had a great effect on the minds of its people.

One last word about the poet who first told these stories in Persian poetry. His name was Firdausi, and he was born somewhere about the beginning of the eleventh century, that period when the Danes were overrunning England and preparing to conquer it.

A legend of his birth says that when he was born, his father in a dream saw the child turn his face to the west, and lift up his voice, so that the whole world echoed with the sound. This, of course, foretold the wonderful poem he was to write. It took him thirty-three years to finish it; and when, old and weary, he brought it before the Sultan of Persia and laid it at his feet, the latter knew so little how to judge of good poetry, that he received it with anger and contempt, and drove the poet from the Court. For years the old man wandered from one city to another; and always the hate of the Sultan Mahmoud followed him and drove him forth; until at length, weary to death, he returned to his own native land, ready to meet death at his royal master's hands. But meantime the Sultan heard from every city and from every land the praise of old Firdausi and his song. So he began to get very uneasy; and one day, entering a mosque, he saw on the wall, where the poet had written it years ago with a diamond point, the verse:

> "The happy court of Mahmoud is a sea,
> A sea of endless waves without a coast;
> In my unlucky star the fault must be
> If I who plunged for pearls in it, am lost."

Then his heart melted within him, and he longed to see Firdausi face to face and make amends. But ere he could do so, the old man died.

"His work was done; the palaces of Kings
Fade in long rows, and in loud earthquakes fall;
The poem that a godlike poet sings
Shines o'er his memory like a brazen wall."

E. M. W. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Shahs and the Demons	7
II.	The Serpent King	13
III.	The Might of the Cow-Headed Club	20
IV.	The Three Brothers	24
V.	The Story of White-Headed Zal	32
VI.	Rustem the Hero	40
VII.	The Seven Labours of Rustem	48
VIII.	The Seven Labours of Rustem (*concluded*)	55
IX.	The Further Adventures of Kai Kaoos	65
X.	Sohrab the Child of Many Smiles	70
XI.	Sohrab and Rustem	79
XII.	The Death of Sohrab	93
XIII.	The Story of Unlucky Saiawush	100
XIV.	The Coming of Kai Khosroo	117
XV.	Rustem the Deliverer	135
VI.	Rustem Fights with Demons and Rescues Byzun	155

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	Barzu the Boastful	174
XVIII.	The End of Peran-Wisa and Afrasiab his King	193
XIX.	How Kai Khosroo Found His Rest	201
XX.	How Gushtasp Won His Way	207
XXI.	The Story of Prince Isfendiyar	213
XXII.	The Death of Rustem	233
	Pronouncing List of Names	239

ILLUSTRATIONS

		PAGE
ZAL AND RUDABEH . . .	(*Gertrude A. Steel*)	*Frontispiece*
"HE TORE THE HATED PARCHMENT INTO LITTLE PIECES" . .	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	20
"RUSTEM AROUSED THE MONSTER"	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	60
"TELL ME, I PRAY THEE, WHO IS MY SIRE?"	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	72
THE DEATH OF SOHRAB. . .	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	98
"IN THEIR MIDST IS ONE LIKE UNTO RUSTEM" . . .	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	144
A ROYAL HUNT	(*XVI Century MS.*).	162
THE DEATH OF PERAN-WISA . .	(*Gertrude A. Steel*) .	196

KALMUCKS
KUZZAKS
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
Jaxartes R.
KIRGHIZZES
TURKISTAN
Orgunje
KIPTCHAK
Khiva
KHIVA
Oxus R.
TRANSOXIANA
Samarcand
Bokhara
BOKHARA
PAMER
PLAIN OF TOORKMANS
ADERBAIJAN
TUKAS
ATTOCKS
Toorghai
KHORASSAN
ILVATS
Elburz Mts.
Casbin
Indian Caucasus
Cabul
AFGHANISTAN
PERSIA
Hindoos
Hyderabad
Ispahan
Hellmund R.
Persepolis
Zurrah L.
BELLOOCHISTAN

The Book of Rustem

CHAPTER I

THE SHAHS AND THE DEMONS

THE first of the famous monarchs of the kingdom of Persia was Shah Kaiumers. From him men learnt to make clothes for themselves, fashioned in his days from tiger-skins, so that they looked half-man, half-beast. He taught them also the meaning of law and government, and beneath his wise sway the kingdom of Persia grew strong and prosperous.

He did not live in the midst of his people as kings are wont to do, but dwelt among the mountains like a hermit, and the beasts of the hills and woods and valleys loved him, and followed him as if he were their father. And when he descended from the mountains and came to sit upon his throne to give laws to his people, great herds of wild creatures crowded round about him, anxious to do him homage.

Now, this good Shah had one son whom he loved very dearly ; and many a time he talked of the days when this brave young prince should succeed him on the throne of Persia and win great glory in the land.

In those days there dwelt a hideous Demon in the gloomy haunts of the mountains, who was very jealous

of the prosperity of the kingdom of Persia. Determined to overthrow its ruler and seize it for himself, he called his son, a creature still more hideous than himself, and bade him gather together an army of the Demons of the Air and wage war against Kaiumers and his son.

When darkness fell upon the land, the Angel of Protection, who each night flies seven times round the world to guard the sons of men, appeared to the King and warned him of this threatened danger.

Then, because he had but a small army, the King was unwilling to go forth against the Demon. The Prince, however, discovered that the son of the Demon was advancing at the head of his troops, and had dared him to single conflict, whereupon nothing would hold him back. Throwing his leopard-skin cloak about him, he rode with haste, and was not content until he found himself engaged in deadly struggle with his foe. But his ardour could not prevail against that grim dragon grip, and ere long the hapless Prince was dragging lifeless along the ground in the Demon's grasp.

At that dread sight the army of Persia broke and fled, and full soon was the ill news borne to King Kaiumers. The King was broken-hearted at the loss of his gallant son, and for a whole year he ceased not to weep and lament for his death. But at the end of that time the Angel of Protection once more appeared to him: "Weep no more," said he, "but rise up and avenge your son. You have but to send out your army against the Demon host, with another Prince of Persia at its head, and the victory shall be his."

Then the King bethought him of his grandson, Prince Husheng, who during the past year had almost taken the place of his dead father in the people's hearts. Calling

the young Prince to his side, he reminded him of his father's gallant struggle against their cruel foe, and bade him gather an army together and go out in his turn against the Demons of the Mountain. The Prince joyfully accepted the mission, and sent forth his call to arms, whereupon all the animals of the hills and forests—the wolf, the lion, the panther, the tiger—came together in great bands to join the army which had rapidly assembled. So a vast host of men and beasts set forth, and the very air overhead was darkened by reason of the flocks of birds which gathered together to the fight. At sight of this array the Demons trembled and would have fled; but Prince Husheng pressed after that Spirit of Evil who had slain his father, and killed both him and all his kindred before they could escape. And afterwards the army of men and beasts fought with the host of the Evil Ones, and overthrew them and tore them to pieces. So the triumph of Persia was complete, and Kaiumers could die in peace, leaving his grandson Husheng to reign in his stead.

Husheng it was who first taught his people the use of fire and founded the religion of the fire-worshippers. And it was in this way that fire was discovered.

Husheng was one day wandering with a train of followers among the mountains, when he saw crouched beneath a rock a terrible dragon, which sent forth smoke from its gaping mouth. The King forthwith shot an arrow; then, as this took no effect, he snatched up a stone and flung it at the creature; but it struck not the dragon, but the rock, and in so doing brought out a shower of sparks, which falling on the dry grass kindled a great fire, in which the monster perished. At first men feared the fire as if it were some wild beast; but Husheng told them how it

should be tamed, and what marvellous power it would bestow if rightly used; and when they saw all this, they worshipped it as being a Light sent down from heaven.

So in this manner the art of the blacksmith first became known to men. Husheng taught them also how to cook their food, and how to make bread, for before they knew the use of fire they had lived entirely on raw fruits. In due time Husheng died, and Shah Tahumers reigned in his stead. In his days men learnt how to spin and weave wool into garments, for up to this time they had worn only the skins of beasts.

He too had wonderful power over birds and animals, and the wild hawk, the panther, and the tiger would follow him to the chase like friends. But during his reign war with the Demons of the Mountain broke out afresh. For a wise man had got one of them into his power by means of charms, and had shut him into a bottle and conveyed him to the King; at this insult to one of their race all his friends and relations were filled with fury, and they forthwith gathered an army to destroy the King. So on one side brave warriors were fighting with mace and spear, and on the other side were Demons, fighting with fire and smoke. At the onset, however, the King killed the chief of the Evil Ones at the first blow; and on seeing this the rest would have fled, but the army of the Persians prevented their flight, and would have put them all to death, had they not prevailed upon the King to spare their lives, promising if he would do so to teach him a wonderful art. In fulfilment of this promise the Demons forthwith brought him books made from the skins of beasts, and pens from the feathers of birds, and ink from the juices of plants; and with these they taught him how to read and write. And all that they showed

to him he taught again unto the people; and thus, united by a common love of learning, the Persians and the Demons lived at peace with one another. So the years of Shah Tahumers passed away in calm security, and, being ended, Shah Jemshid his son reigned in his stead.

This Shah was a wise and learned king. He it was who first taught men the use of armour, and how to fight with the sword, and in his days the men of Persia grew both rich and luxurious. They no longer wore garments of wool or the skins of beasts, but beautiful robes of silk and linen were woven among them. Yet Jemshid would not permit his people to be idle: every man had his own task to fulfil; much labour was spent on the cultivation of what had once been desert land.

245

The Shah ruled over the Demons as his father had done; and he caused them to build for him a beautiful palace, with high turrets, roofs, and balconies. This was said to be the first building made of brick in all the world. In its midst was set a magnificent throne, studded with pearls, rubies, and turquoises; and Jemshid taught the Demons to raise this in the air and to balance it in such a way that he could be transported upon it from place to place and descend in whatever spot he chose. On the first day of each year this monarch held a great festival, to which high and low, rich and poor, mortals and Demons alike, were free to come and feast with him. And thus many happy years passed away. But, alas! it came to pass that his prosperity caused the heart of Shah Jemshid to become puffed up with pride, and, sending for all the wisest and most illustrious men in his land, he asked them, saying:

"Is there in all the world, or has there ever been. a king so powerful and magnificent as I?"

And they answered every one: "Thou, O King, art the most glorious and the mightiest of all men: and no man can hope to be thy equal." Then said the gratified King; "Behold, I am unequalled in all the earth. All things that are good—knowledge, peace, joy, rest—come from me. I alone rule the world."

Scarcely had he uttered this proud boast when a curious change began to take place. The brightness of his throne faded, the brilliant palace grew dark and grey. The people of the land, who had always hastened to fulfil his commands, no longer gazed at him with awe and reverence, but openly grumbled at his government and treated his words with contempt. Gradually all glory and renown faded from the King's presence, and his name became a by-word in the land. The wise men jeered at him, the nobles made plots against him, and his subjects one and all looked insolently upon him as he passed among them.

Instead of taking warning from these signs, Jemshid only gave way to gusts of passion, which one by one drove from his court even those nobles who might have been willing to aid him with counsel and support; and at las the unhappy King found himself without a friend.

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CHAPTER II

THE SERPENT KING

MEANTIME there lived in Arabia a good and gentle chieftain named Mirtas. Providence had smiled upon his industry and wisdom, and he was renowned for the fruitfulness of his flocks and herds. But prosperity did not spoil him, and he was equally famous for his gentle charity. It is said that every day he distributed milk from a thousand goats and sheep and camels among the poor. This good man had a son named Zohak, who possessed ten thousand Arab horses. One day when Zohak was driving these horses to fresh pastures he met a stranger, who conversed with him in such an interesting and pleasing manner that the young man began to take great pleasure in his company, and begged him to continue his discourse. The stranger replied that he had indeed a very important secret to tell to Zohak, but he could not tell it till the latter had vowed solemnly never to disclose it. This the youth promised at once, never guessing that the stranger was no other than Iblis, the Spirit of Evil, come to tempt him to a great crime. Then Iblis said to him: "Thy father is now a weak old man, and thou art strong and valiant. Why not put him out of the way and make thyself chieftain of the tribes?" At this Zohak was horrified; but when he expressed his anger

and disgust, the Evil One replied that two courses alone lay open: either his father must die or he himself must be put to death. Then the weakness of Zohak showed itself, and he began to ask what he should do. And Iblis told him to dig a pit and cover it with grass in the way which his father must take to the House of Prayer; and this was done, so that the good old Mirtas fell therein, and died.

Then Zohak became chieftain of the tribes; and when he was sad and downcast at the thought of his evil deed, Iblis came and flattered him with fair words, promising that if he would follow his counsel and advice he should rule over the whole world. This was very pleasing to Zohak, and forthwith Iblis became his chief companion and adviser, continually adding to his influence over him by his magic arts and many devices; particularly by his ability to prepare all kinds of dainty dishes, made from every kind of bird and beast. But despite the richness and variety of the food thus placed before Zohak, nothing pleased him so much as an egg. Strange to say, he deemed this more delicate and delicious than all the luxuries prepared by Iblis, and, discovering this, the wily Spirit went to the kitchen and made ready a marvellous dish of partridge and pheasant. The chieftain was enraptured with the flavour of the new dish, and cried in his delight, "Whatever I can grant, you shall have as reward for your skill!" Then Iblis said carelessly that he had but a simple request to make—to kiss the bare shoulder of the Shah. The unsuspecting Zohak at once agreed, and Iblis, stooping, kissed the shoulder-blades, and with a fiendish laugh disappeared.

Scarcely had men ceased to wonder at this marvel, when it was seen that from the shoulders of the king had

grown two black serpents, which writhed this way and that as though seeking for food. In vain the wise men came with their charms and tried to cure this dreadful ill; no cure could be discovered, nor was any trace of the wicked Iblis to be found in all the land.

The Evil One, meantime, had assumed the shape of a physician, and one day he came to Zohak as though to heal him. When he had examined the reptiles, however, he told the despairing chieftain that there was no remedy, and that he must continue to carry them for the rest of his life. Zohak, in his misery, asked if there was no way in which his lot might be made easier; and the pretended physician then informed him that if the serpents were fed each day with human brains it was possible that they would die. Moreover, in any case, the life of Zohak would be prolonged and made more cheerful, were the reptiles appeased with such daily food.

Then Iblis departed, well pleased at the thought that by this wicked plan, thousands of the hated human race would perish.

Now the strangest part of the story is that when men knew of Zohak and his devouring serpents, they were so filled with a sense of his power and might that they hastened to do him homage. And among those that came from neighbouring countries were certain nobles of Persia, whom the self-love and arrogance of Shah Jemshid, their ruler, had driven into revolt. These nobles offered the crown of Persia to Zohak, and he thus became king of that country. Jemshid, in the meantime, had been driven into exile, which at last terminated in his cruel death at the hands of his successor.

Meantime the provinces of Arabia were in a state of the greatest misery. Each day the servants of the king went

forth to lay hands on two young men, who were straightway brought back to the palace and killed, that the serpents might be fed with their brains. None were spared for rank or poverty; slave and noble alike suffered, and all the land groaned under the cruel and tyrannical oppression of the Serpent King. Year by year he grew more bloodthirsty and evil-minded, so that he loved to see his people writhe in misery, and cared only to think of what fresh crimes he might commit.

At length, however, his peace of mind was rudely stirred. He dreamt one night that he was attacked by three warriors. Two of them were very tall and broad, the third was small ; but it was the latter who struck him a heavy blow on the head with his mace, bound his hands, and, putting a rope round his neck, dragged him along the streets, while crowds of onlookers shouted and triumphed over him.

Zohak awoke pale and trembling, and, sending for the Wise Men of his court, he bade them tell him what the dream meant. The Wise Men saw that it portended the fall of the tyrant's power ; but they dared not tell this to the monarch, for they knew that he would kill them in return for the information. So they spent three days in the pretence of examining more closely the signs and portents of the dream. But on the fourth day the king grew very wroth, and insisted that they should speak out at once. Then the Wise Men said, very unwillingly : " If the truth must be told, the dream portends that thy life will soon be ended, and one Feridoon, though yet unborn, will be thy successor on the throne."

" Who," asked Zohak, black with anger, " was he who struck the blow on my head ? "

" That," said the trembling Wise Men, " was Feridoon

himself." "And who is this Feridoon, and why should he injure me?" asked the king. "Thou shalt spill his father's blood," was the reply, "and from the hands of Feridoon will vengeance fall."

Then the king, from mingled fear and horror, fell senseless from his seat; and when he recovered he sent spies through the land to find out the family from which Feridoon should be born. The Wise Men had discovered that he should spring from the race of Shah Jemshid, the former ruler of Persia, and so it was ordered that every man of that clan should be seized and fettered and brought before him. For a while did Abtin, the father of the child Feridoon, escape, by hiding among the rocks and caverns of the mountains; but one day he gave way to his longing to look upon his native village once again, and, venturing forth, was at once taken prisoner and brought before Zohak, who, looking upon him with fiendish glee, ordered him to be put to death.

Now when the mother of Feridoon heard this she took up her child, who was just two months old, and sought to hide herself and her boy. At length, wearied and ill with terror and fatigue, she came to a beautiful garden, which she entered. The child cried for food, but she had none to give him, and she greatly feared that his wails would betray their retreat. But there passed by a most beautiful cow, who bowed her head to the royal infant and gave him milk in abundance. Next morning, knowing that she could not remain in that place long without being discovered, she placed the boy asleep beneath some flowering shrubs, and departed, meaning to return when she had found a safer refuge for him. Meantime the keeper of the garden, a good and gentle man, found the child, with the cow keeping guard beside him; and he

took charge of the infant, and nourished him and brought him up for the space of three years. During this time his mother had been wandering among the mountains in much distress of mind; and she now returned to the garden, and, telling the keeper that she had been warned from on high that her boy was no longer safe in his care, she carried him off to the rocky crevices of Mount Elburz. There as they wandered, weary and hungry, they came upon a hermit, or dervish, as these men were called in Persia, who not only shared with them his food and clothing, but showed them a secret place where they might dwell in safety. It was well that they had left the garden; for scarcely had they done so when Zohak, the Serpent King, who had just discovered that the great-grandson of Jemshid was under the protection of the keeper, visited the spot with a great force, put to death the keeper and his servant and the cow which had given milk to Feridoon, and even ordered that fair garden to be ploughed up, so that the very ground might be punished for the protection it had given to his infant foe.

Meantime the dervish continued to provide food both for the body and the mind of young Feridoon. And when the boy was about sixteen, and had acquired all kinds of knowledge, the dervish said to his mother: "Thy son shall first destroy Zohak and his tyranny, and then shall reign as monarch of all the earth." Then Feridoon began to question his mother as to why Zohak had put his father to death; and, having heard, he became possessed of a great desire to be avenged upon the tyrant. In vain his mother pointed out that he was but a boy, friendless and alone, while his enemy was great and powerful, and master of the world. He scarcely heard her, so anxious

was he to go forth and try his strength against the king And every day, although he knew not of his existence, did Zohak grow more irritable and unhappy with secret dread ; and all the people talked in hushed voices of the deliverer who should come and save the land from the tyrant's power.

CHAPTER III

THE MIGHT OF THE COW-HEADED CLUB

WHEN Zohak saw that his life was in perpetual danger from the unknown Feridoon, he assembled a great army of men and demons for his protection; and, fearing treachery from his own people, he caused a parchment to be written, declaring that he had always been to them a kind and merciful king. This he desired that every one in his kingdom should sign, so that it should serve also as a kind of register of all the people in the land. Many obeyed, for they were in great fear of him; but, while the declaration was being carried through the land, there appeared in the presence of the king a blacksmith, wearing his leather apron, who stood and cried; "Justice, O King!"

Then Zohak said: "Who is the man who has done you wrong?"

And Kavah the blacksmith answered: "It is thou, O King, who hast done me foul wrong. Seventeen fair sons have sat round my table, and all save one have been taken from me to feed the hunger of thy Serpents. And now they would take even my last child for that same cruel purpose!"

Then Zohak was afraid, and ordered that the boy

" He tore the hated parchment into little pieces "

should be released, and spoke fair words to Kavah. But before the smith was allowed to depart he ordered him to sign the parchment in which were set forth the virtues of the king.

But Kavah, full of wrath at his former wrongs, cried out to the bystanders: "What! Will you sign a lie! And are you men or what, that you should thus obey this friend of demons!" And, so saying, he tore the hated parchment into little pieces, and cast them down and trampled them under his foot.

All stood aghast at this deed of daring; but, while Zohak and his nobles discussed the event, the blacksmith hastened to the market-place, and cried aloud a list of all the tyrant's many cruelties, and the wrongs the nation had suffered at his hands. Quickly the people gathered round him, many shouting, "Justice! Justice!" and Kavah set his leathern apron upon a spear and held it up for a banner, crying, "Let us discover Feridoon, that he may free us from Zohak's tyranny!"

For many days they sought him, till at length one day Feridoon, coming down from the mountain, saw a great crowd led by a man who carried a leathern apron upon a spear, and at once knew that the hour was come to fulfil his destiny. The apron was adorned with gold and jewels, and men called it the flag of Kavah. In future days every Shah of Persia was to do honour to that banner. But Feridoon, mindful of his earliest friend, desired Kavah the blacksmith to make for him a club of iron, shaped like the head of a cow. When this was done he stepped forth, bright of eye and firm of foot, eager to begin the contest with his lifelong foe. During his years of solitude he had learnt much of the art of magic, and this was now to stand him in good

stead. For, as they marched towards the distant city, two of his half brothers, who were jealous of Feridoon, grew to hate him, and determined to bring about his fall. So, one day, as he lay asleep at the foot of a steep cliff, they rolled a heavy rock from the top with intent to crush him. But Feridoon, by his magic art, was made aware of their wicked design, and by his power the rock was stayed in mid-descent. His brothers, much astonished, hastened to say that they had nothing to do with its fall ; and Feridoon, though he knew all, pretended ignorance, and raised them to high places in his army.

After a while they came to the river Tigris ; but when they called for boats, the ferrymen answered that they had been given strict orders from the king not to let any one across who could not show the royal permission. At this answer Feridoon shouted in his wrath, and, plunging into the swift stream, swam his charger across to the other side, where he was soon joined by all his followers. Forthwith they marched upon the royal city of Zohak, to find that the Serpent King was absent with most of his army, hunting for Feridoon and his rebel band. The invaders came to the royal palace, in which a talisman was guarded by enchanted monsters, and by demons of various shapes ; but all these were quickly overcome by the magic power of Feridoon, who set free imprisoned damsels, some of whom had never seen the sun, and drove away the Keeper of the palace. Then he took his seat upon the throne of Zohak ; and the people hastened thither to hail him as Shah in their tyrant's stead.

Meantime the Keeper of the palace fled to Zohak, and told him that a young warrior had come upon the palace and had destroyed all the guardians thereof, and had usurped the royal throne. At these tidings Zohak was

beside himself with terror; but, not daring to show it, lest his army should despair, he pretended to take the news very lightly, and merely said: "Some playful guest has surely performed this act in jest."

"A strange jest!" said the Keeper. "I tell you, O King, that the young man has come with his cow-headed club and has battered down your defences, so that the city is open to his violence; and as for the talisman, he has it in his power."

Then Zohak grew very angry, and reproached the Keeper, saying: "You have fled through fear, and betrayed your trust. No longer shall you share my confidence and bounty." To which the man laughingly replied: "Your kingdom now is overthrown, and you have nothing left to give; you yourself are lost."

This was but too true; for when the soldiers remembered the horrors of Zohak's reign, and how many of their comrades had gone to feed the ever-hungry serpents, they were eager to fight for Feridoon. Then Zohak left his army and planned to kill Feridoon, taking him unawares at night; but the latter discovered him in the very act, and, raising his cow-headed club, would have struck him to the earth, had not a mysterious voice bidden him stay his hand. A worse fate was in store for the Serpent King; for, by the order of the new Shah, he was bound with heavy chains and fastened to a rock within a deep, dark cave, there to end his wicked days alone.

And thus the world was delivered from evil for a while; and Feridoon ruled as Shah.

CHAPTER IV

THE THREE BROTHERS

THE sons of Shah Feridoon were three in number; but they had no names until they were grown up, for their father wished first to test their hearts and see what manner of men they might be. And in due time he bade them go forth to the land of Yemen and win for themselves the three beautiful daughters of King Saru. So they set off to the land of Yemen, and the king came out to meet them with gorgeous train, glittering in purple and gold. When he knew the object of their visit he gladly accepted the suit of the sons of Feridoon, giving to them his daughters and great store of treasure besides. Now, as they returned to their fatherland, Shah Feridoon went out to try their hearts, and this is how he accomplished his purpose. He took upon him the shape of a fiery dragon, and, lying wait for his sons in a narrow pass among the mountains, he sprang out with loud roarings and foamings of the mouth, and threw himself upon the eldest. The prince at once flung down his spear and fled, saying, "A wise man does not fight with dragons," and left his brothers at the mercy of the monster. Then the dragon attacked the second son, who snatched up his bow and fitted an arrow, saying, "If fight I must, it matters not

whether it be man or monster." But the youngest ran between them, crying, "Thou dragon, depart from our presence, and tread not in the path of lions. For if thou hast heard the name of Feridoon thou wilt know that thy chance is small against his sons. Depart, then, before thou comest to greater harm."

At this the dragon vanished, and as they proceeded on their way Feridoon came out to meet them, bearing the cow-headed club, and waving the banner of Kavah the blacksmith. And his three sons ran to kiss the ground at his feet; but Feridoon raised them up and embraced them, and brought them with great honour into the palace. Then, when they were seated on three thrones, he said to them: "My sons, I was that dragon who met you on your way, for I wished to test your hearts. And now will I give you such names as befit you. The eldest shall be called Selim, which signifies, 'May your wishes be accomplished!' for he wished to save himself from the dragon, and did not hesitate to flee in the hour of danger. The second shall be called Tur, the Courageous, for he shrank not in the face of peril, and cared not what risk he ran. But the youngest showed both courage and wisdom, for, though he boldly faced the dragon, he appeased him with gentle words, proving himself a man of counsel, knowing both when to haste and when to tarry. He, therefore, shall be called Iredi, the gate of power."

Then Feridoon divided his empire into three parts, and gave them to his sons. To Selim he gave Roum and Khaver, the lands of the western sun; to Tur, the land of Turan, or Turkestan, a savage country, full of revolt and war; but to Iredi he gave the land of Persia, or Iran —fair as a garden in spring-time, full of sweetness and colour.

Now it came to pass that when Feridoon was very old and near his end, the elder brother, Selim, grew jealous of Iredi, and sent a messenger to his brother Tur, saying, "Our father has given to Iredi, the youngest, a fair and smiling country, and to each of us a wild, uncultivated region. Tell me now, I pray you, shall we remain for ever satisfied with this division?"

Tur was in full accord with this spirit of envy, and he decided to help Selim in any effort he might make to deprive Iredi of his domain. But, being a wily man, he wished first to acquaint his father with their dissatisfaction; for he said to himself, "It may be that he will make a new division, and then Persia may fall to me."

So a messenger went forth to the court of Feridoon, carrying a rude and unfilial request. "Give," they said, "this young lad Iredi a more humble portion; or else we will bring our troops in overwhelming numbers from the mountains of Turan and Roum, and shower disgrace on him and on the land of Persia."

The aged king was much displeased and perturbed at this message, saying, "What wrong, then, have I done? I gave you kingdoms—surely that was not a crime. But if ye fear not me, at least fear God, and do not bring unnatural strife into this land. I am too old to be moved by this rebellion; all I can do is to counsel peace."

When the messenger had gone Feridoon sent for Iredi, and told him all, saying in conclusion, "My son, I am very aged and infirm, and my greatest wish is to spend my last days in peace. I counsel you, therefore, to preserve friendship with your brothers, and throw away all desire for dominion."

In this Iredi willingly agreed, declaring that he would gladly give up his throne to avoid warfare with his brothers.

So, though naturally full of anger at their greed and jealousy, he prepared to visit them for the purpose of placing his kingdom at their disposal, if by no other means he could win their favour and affection. He set off with a very small retinue, and without signs of rank or honour, and presently arrived in the country of Turkestan, where he found the armies of his two brothers ready to march against him. They received him, however, with kindness, touched, apparently, by his youth and by the beauty of his face and figure.

Now the soldiers saw Iredi as he passed through their midst, and they also were struck with his appearance, and on all sides was heard the saying, "He indeed is fit to be a king!" And as he went about the city crowds of people followed him, admiring him and calling down blessings upon his head. When they saw this Selim and Tur became seriously alarmed; yet they were glad of the opportunity thus given, and they said: "We are obliged now to kill him, for, if not, our armies will espouse his cause, and our kingdoms will be his as well as that of Persia."

So Tur tried to pick a quarrel with Iredi, saying, "Why did you consent to be ruler of Persia, thereby placing us, your brothers, in an unworthy position? Must you, indeed, have gold and treasure, while we, your elders, are bereft of our heritage?" But Iredi answered: "I care not for a great kingdom, nor do I seek a name among the Persian host, and though the throne and diadem are mine, I here renounce them, and from henceforth will lead a private life. For why should I grieve your hearts or give distress to any human being? I am young, and Heaven forbid that I should prove unkind." In spite of these gentle words, the cruel Tur refused to believe him, and,

snatching up the golden chair on which he had been sitting, he struck his young brother to the ground. And as the youth, struggling for life and speech, prayed for mercy and pity for their father's sake, he drew his dagger and cut off his head. Moreover, with fiendish cruelty, he sent the head of young Iredi to Feridoon, saying, "Here is the head of thy favourite son; crown it now as thou wert wont."

Thereafter Feridoon lived only for vengeance upon his unnatural sons; but many years passed before his plans were ripe.

In the meantime, his granddaughter, the only child of Iredi, had grown up and was married, and now had given birth to a child, who was so like his grandfather Iredi in every feature that it seemed to old Feridoon that his darling son had come to life again in the person of the young Minuchir. From the first he was trained to bear arms and to exercise rule over the people, and directly he was old enough to command, a great army was gathered together under his banner. When Selim and Tur heard of these preparations, and heard also of the valour of young Minuchir, they quaked with fear, and forthwith despatched to their father a messenger leading elephants loaded with treasure, which they implored him to accept in token that he forgave their offences. "'Twas Iblis, Spirit of Evil, who led us astray," they said, "Let our tears wash away the faults we have committed. We offer now our fealty to you and to Minuchir, and await your commands, being but the dust off your feet" All this the messenger reported, adding, moreover, that the desire of his masters was that they might see their young kinsman, and lay, if he wished, their kingdoms at his feet.

The king heard their words with open scorn, saying,

"Do they indeed long to see the face of Minuchir? In truth they shall see him, surrounded by his soldiers, and they shall feel, moreover, the edge of his sword."

Then the king showed the awestruck messenger his array of warriors and their chieftains, one by one, and, having done so, sent him away with these last words: "Tell your master that the young lion, the glory of his race, comes forth to conquer. Take hence your gold, and hie you to your own land."

The wicked brothers were at first overcome with fear when they heard how their envoy had been received. At length, however, they plucked up heart, and determined, since fight they must, to be the first to carry war into the dominions of Persia. When Feridoon heard that they were on the march, he was overjoyed, saying, "The forest game surrenders itself into the hand of the sportsman"; and he commanded his army to await quietly their approach. So the warriors of Persia assembled with their heavy clubs, impatient for the onset; and in the front waved the sacred banner of the blacksmith. In their midst gleamed the form of Minuchir, like some tall cypress tree, and on his right the warrior Sahm led his troops to victory.

When at length the opposing armies faced one another King Tur stood forth and poured words of insult and scorn on the lad Minuchir; but he only smiled, saying, "It is not by words, but by hard fighting, that the best will be proved. I ask but for revenge—revenge for Iredi, my grandsire."

Next day at dawn the battle commenced, and long and fiercely did it rage. Thousands on both sides were slain; but in the end victory rested with Minuchir.

Seeing that they could not succeed by fair means

it was proposed that night by Tur to attack the prince's camp by stealth ; but the spies of Minuchir reported all to him, and when Tur approached he found his foes alert and eager. In the struggle that ensued Minuchir and Tur met face to face, and the young prince hurled his foe from his saddle and cut off his head, leaving his body to be devoured by the wild beasts. Then he proceeded in search of Selim. The latter, however, always watchful for his safety, had promptly retired to a fort, to which Minuchir at once began to lay siege. One day during the siege a warrior issued from the fort, and, riding close to Minuchir, threw a javelin at him, just missing his head. Immediately the prince caught the man by the girdle, and, raising him high in the air, flung him to the ground, so that he died. Such was the strength of Minuchir.

At length the young prince sent a challenge to Selim, saying, " Let the battle be decided between us two. Quit the fort and meet me boldly here, and let us see to whom God will give the victory." Selim could not refuse this challenge without being disgraced in the eyes of his army. He came out from the fort, therefore, and a desperate conflict ensued, which ended, as in the former contest, with the victory of Minuchir, who cut off the head of his uncle ; and thus ended the bitter feud.

Then the leaders of the hostile armies came to Minuchir and sought his protection, promising that they and their men would serve him loyally. And thus all the forces of Selim and Tur came into his hands. This complete triumph filled the heart of old Feridoon with joy ; and he came out on foot to meet the victorious prince, and embraced him, and set him on the throne at his side. Then he ordered the crown to be brought, and put it with his own hands on the prince's head ; and soon afterwards, having stored his mind with

counsel good and wise, he committed the young prince to the care of Sahm, the greatest of his warriors, and lay down to die in peace.

So Minuchir reigned in his stead.

The army and the people gave him praise,
Prayed for his happiness and length of days;
"Our hearts," they said, "are ever bound to thee;
Our hearts, inspired by love and loyalty."

CHAPTER V

THE STORY OF WHITE-HEADED ZAL

NOW Sahm, the chief of all the warriors of Shah Minuchir, was a childless man, and this grieved him very deeply. Years passed away, and at length a son was born to him, beautiful of face and limb, but, strange to say, with hair perfectly white, like that of an old man.

Then Sahm listened to the foolish talk of those around him, who said that this betokened some great calamity to his house, and that it would be well to get rid of the child. He even allowed himself to be persuaded that the babe was a demon-child; and at length determined to take the boy up the steep sides of Mount Elburz, there to leave him to be devoured of wild beasts.

Now on the top of Mount Elburz, whose head touched the stars of heaven, dwelt a marvellous bird called the Simurgh, in a beautiful nest made of ebony and sandal-wood, twined with branches of aloe. Flying about in search of food wherewith to feed his little ones, this great bird came upon the white-headed babe, as he lay naked among the rocks, gnawing his fingers for hunger, and bore him off in his talons to his nest. And as he flew through the air a spirit voice addressed him, and bade him not to harm the child, but to nourish and protect

him, since he should in future days become the parent of one who was to be the champion of the world.

So the great bird tended the son of Sahm like a prince, bringing him the tenderest morsels of food and giving him the warmest corners of the nest. As the boy grew tall and strong he taught him the language of his own country, though as yet he hid from him the story of his early days.

Meantime Sahm had passed through years of miserable longing for his only son, and at length, as he lay one night upon his couch, he dreamed a strange dream. He thought a man came to his tent riding upon an Arab steed; and the stranger said to him: "O thou ungrateful father, who left thy son to perish because his hair was white, and who thought a bird to be fit nurse for a son as fair as a silver poplar-tree, wilt thou let another day go by before thou claimest him for thine own?"

Then Sahm awoke, and began to question his wise men as to whether his child could be yet alive; and they replied; "O faint of heart, who wast ashamed of the white hair given thy son by his Creator, search the world for him, for he whom God hath blessed can never perish."

So Sahm set out upon his quest, and, hearing of the fame of a wonderful boy who dwelt in a bird's nest, he bethought him of his dream. Far and wide he searched on the sides of Mount Elburz, and at length, far above his head, he caught sight of the great nest of the Simurgh; and on the edge, shading his eyes with his hand as he surveyed the world at his feet, stood a noble boy. Sahm tried in vain to climb towards the nest, for the sides of the mountain in that place were as smooth as polished glass. Then he began to pray and weep, and implore the Almighty to help him and to forgive his past cruelty; and so God heard him, and moved the Simurgh to look down upon his grief

and to have pity on him. Turning to the white-headed boy, the bird said: "O thou child, whom I have reared as one of my own, the time has come when I must give thee back to thine own people. For thy father, Sahm the Warrior, is come to seek thee, and by his side thou shalt be great and glorious."

But the boy wept, saying, "Art thou, then, glad to be rid of me, or am I not fit to dwell longer in thy nest? Behold, thou art my only friend on this wide earth."

"Fear not, my son," replied the bird. "It is now time for thee to seek thy fortune in the world, and thou shalt find it a better place than this poor nest. But that thou mayst never forget thy early home, and the nurse who brought thee up with his own little ones, take these three feathers from my breast, and guard them with care. If ever thou art in danger or in need of help, throw one upon the fire, and it will bring me to thy aid at once." Then the Simurgh raised the boy in his talons, and carried him to the place where Sahm still knelt and prayed. And when Sahm had blessed and thanked the bird he embraced his son, and put handsome clothes upon him; also, because of his snow-white hair, he named him Zal, which means The Aged.

When Shah Minuchir heard the news he ordered that gifts of horses and swords and jewels be sent to Zal. He also bade his Wise Men foretell the future, and they announced that the white-headed boy should become a brave and valiant knight, and the parent of the greatest warrior the world had ever known. Every day did Zal increase in wisdom and in judgment; and when his father Sahm went forth to fight, Zal remained behind in the city of Seistan, which Sahm ruled, and governed it wisely and well.

Now one day Zal desired to make a journey throughout

the neighbouring States, and he set off with a train of followers, and presently came to the city of Cabul. This city was governed by a king named Mihrab, a good and virtuous man, but descended from the Serpent King, whose very name was an abomination to the followers of the Shah. Mihrab received his visitor with much kindness, and made him a great feast in his tents; and as they talked together one of the nobles of Cabul began to describe to Zal the beauty of the daughter of Mihrab, who was called Rudabeh. "Talk not of beauty till you have seen this peerless damsel," said he. "Her blush is like the rich pomegranate flower, her eyes are soft as the narcissus, with lashes like unto the raven's plume, and her brows are like an archer's bow."

Then Zal fell deeply in love with the maiden before ever he had seen her, and sat and pondered how he might make her his wife. The hospitable Mihrab prayed him to become his guest within the palace, but Zal, though he longed to do so, refused, saying that the Shah and Sahm his father would never forgive him if he should break bread beneath the roof of Zohak. So Mihrab went sorrowfully away, and, entering the apartments of his wife, he began to describe the beauty and courage of the young man, and to praise him as though he were his own son. Now it so happened that Rudabeh was sitting with her mother at that time, and when she heard this description of Zal she fell in love with him in her turn, and could neither eat nor sleep for thinking of him. At length she could keep her secret no longer, so she told her favourite slaves, and bade them help her to meet the white-haired hero face to face. The difficulty on both sides was the feud between the house of Zohak and the Shahs of Persia, and so a meeting could only be brought about by craft.

Now just outside the city was a beautiful garden of flowers, which lay along the banks of the river where Zal was encamped. Thither went the little band of Rudabeh's maidens, singing and gathering roses to throw into the water, until they came to the spot opposite to which lay the tents of Zal. "Who are these maidens?" asked the young warrior; and they answered that they were damsels sent by the Moon of Cabul into the Garden of Flowers.

Then Zal, accompanied by a little page-boy, took his bow and arrows, and, seeing a white bird fly overhead, he shot it, so that it fell among the rose-gatherers; and forthwith he bade the boy cross the water and fetch the bird for him. The maidens at once clustered round the child and asked him who was the archer; and he answered: "'Tis the son of Sahm the hero, the greatest warrior ever known. There is no one in the world to compare with him for strength and beauty."

But the maidens shook their fingers at him, saying, "Boast not, for in the palace of Mihrab is a star that outshines all the rest." When the boy returned and told what he had heard, the heart of Zal was glad, and he sent presents of pearls and gold to the maidens, that they might bear back jewels with their roses. Then the eldest of them came to the brink of the river and spoke of Rudabeh and her beauty, so that he longed still more to marry her; and, casting aside all thought of prudence, he bade the maiden ask her mistress to meet him but once, that he might look upon her face to face.

So at evening time the slave appeared, and took him to a garden in which stood a tower; and presently Rudabeh, fairest of maidens, appeared upon the roof of this tower and bade him welcome.

Not content that such a distance should separate him from his love, Zal asked for a rope, that he might mount beside her; and she, letting down her raven locks till they reached the ground, and fastening the upper part to a ring, made for him a silken ladder whereby he might ascend. And so in this romantic situation they plighted their troth.

Now when these things became known great consternation spread throughout the palaces of Mihrab and Minuchir. For the former dreaded the vengeance of the Shah, and Minuchir was determined to destroy the whole city of Cabul rather than allow a marriage between one of his nobles and the house of Zohak. Fortunately for the lovers just as a vast army was preparing to set out for this purpose, and while Zal was pleading his cause in vain with the Shah, the latter bethought himself of calling his Wise Men together, that they might question the stars of the matter. On the fourth day the Wise Men came to him saying, "Hinder not this marriage, lord of the Golden Girdle; for the son of Sahm and the daughter of Mihrab shall be a glorious pair; and of them shall be born a hero son who shall exalt the honour of Persia to the very heavens. He shall root out evil from the earth, restore sleep to the unhappy, and close the gates of strife for ever; and while he lives the kingdom shall rejoice."

When the Shah heard this he was glad, but he bade them say nothing of it until he himself had tested the wisdom of Zal, in this wise. They sat round in a circle, the king among them, and Zal in their midst. Then the first Wise Man said to the youth: "I have seen twelve trees, well grown and lofty, each sending out thirty branches. But in the kingdom of Persia they can neither grow smaller nor greater. Tell me what these things be."

Zal thought awhile, and answered: "There are twelve moons in the year, and each comes to an end in thirty days."

Then the second Wise Man said: "Thou high-hearted one, what are the two horses, noble and swift, one black, the other white and fair, which run for ever towards a goal they never win?" And Zal replied: "The day and the night are two shining horses, one black, the other white, who constantly strive and flee, yet neither wins the race."

Next came the turn of the third Wise Man. "Who," asked he, "is this strong man who reaps in silence the dry and the green in a fair garden full of springs?" And Zal replied: "Time is the reaper, we the grass. He knows no pity nor fear, and reaps alike both old and young."

The last riddle was the hardest of all.

"Built on a rock a town was set. But men chose rather to live on the level ground, and all memory of the first city died away. Then came an earthquake, and destroyed that city of the plain, so that men longed for their rock-built town. Now what is the meaning of this?"

But Zal answered almost at once. "The rock-built town is eternity, the level plain our passing life. For a time we enjoy its pleasures and its pains, its dreams and eager conflicts. Then winds and earthquakes come, and lo! we long to leave our earth-bound home and climb the rocky heights to a city unshaken by the storm."

When the Shah heard this he embraced Zal warmly, and bade him marry whom he would. And thus the marriage came about in that fair rose-garden where first the lovers met. Once only did sorrow cross their path, and that was when Rudabeh fell ill. All remedies were

tried in vain, till in his despair Zal remembered the feathers given him by the bird who had been his nurse. Casting one upon the fire, he waited in hope and fear; but soon the sky grew dark with rushing wings, and the Simurgh alighted at his feet. On hearing of Zal's trouble the bird of marvel gave him a wonderful remedy, which at once cured Rudabeh of her ills. And after a while a son was born to them, called Rustem, of whom we have much to hear.

CHAPTER VI

RUSTEM THE HERO

WHEN Rustem, the son of Zal, was born into the world he was as big and as strong as a one-year child, and all the people of the land rejoiced at this wondrous birth. When he was eight years old, his grandsire, Sahm, longing to look upon him, made ready a great host and passed into the country of his son; and Rustem rode forth to meet him mounted upon an elephant of war. The aged Sahm gazed on him with delight for a while, and then asked the young boy what gift he would choose to receive. And Rustem answered: "I desire not feasting nor ease nor rest, O my grandfather, great of renown. All I ask for is a horse and saddle, a helmet and coat of mail, that, with javelin in my hand, I may meet the foe and cast his severed head before thee." And Sahm was delighted with these brave words, and lingered long in the land that he might keep his grandson by his side.

Now when Rustem was about ten years of age, as he dwelt in his father's province of Seistan, he was awakened one night from sleep by a mighty roar, which shook the walls of the palace to their foundations. Rushing forth, he learnt amid great confusion that the Shah's white elephant had broken loose, and was killing all those who thronged the highways, trampling them and crushing

them as they fled before him. Immediately Rustem fetched a great club and ran to meet the ferocious beast. In vain did the officers seek to prevent him from running such a risk by barring the doors in his face. One blow from his club sent these flying in splinters, and he was soon in the midst of the terrified crowd. When he saw the elephant Rustem attracted its attention by the loud shout he gave, and just as the huge creature raised its trunk to seize and crush him, he struck such a blow upon its head that it sank down and died.

Then Rustem returned to his bed again, and slept the sleep of the just; but the fame of his deed went forth throughout the realms of Persia, and Shah Minuchir himself rejoiced that a hero had come to the land.

Rustem was still a youth when his grandfather sent him upon an important expedition. Many years before that time the father of Sahm had been sent by Shah Feridoon against an enchanted fort upon a mountain-top whose sides were steep and slippery as glass. Inside this fort were beautiful lawns and rose-gardens and orchards full of fruit and flowers. Moreover, there was abundance of treasure concealed within the walls. In attacking this place, however, Sahm's father had been killed by a great stone which those within the fort had rolled upon him, and though Sahm at once set out to avenge him he met with no success. All around the fort was a trackless desert, in which he could find neither food nor water for himself and his troops; despite close watch, he never saw a living being enter or leave it. It seemed, indeed, like a city of the dead. At length, after waiting for many months, he gave up the attempt in despair, and, sending for his grandson, he said to Rustem: "The time has come when you, who are yet unknown, may accomplish this revenge and become famous in the land." Rustem

readily agreed to make the attempt, and, on the advice of his father, he disguised himself as a salt-merchant, and, having prepared a caravan of camels carrying loads of salt, in which weapons were hidden, he set off for the enchanted fort. Now salt was a precious thing to those dwellers on the mountain, and very rarely to be obtained; and so directly the caravan approached the walls, the gates were opened, and Rustem entered with his band of warriors. He was quickly surrounded by men, women, and children, all eager to purchase salt, and by the time they had finished bargaining night had fallen. As the people dispersed, Rustem, impatient for the fight, drew his men towards the palace of the chieftain, who, roused by their warlike tramp, sprang from his couch and rushed out to meet the invaders. With one blow Rustem felled him to the earth, and he then turned to meet the garrison, who were hastily rushing to arms. All night long the battle raged, and when morning dawned those who were left alive fled from the city, so that not one of the inhabitants remained. Then Rustem burst open the iron gates of the palace, and he found inside a wonderful temple containing all manner of jewels and the finest gold. Loading the camels with all the treasure they could carry, Rustem bade his warriors burn down every building in the city, so that no trace of it remained; and thus did he avenge the death of his grandfather's sire.

Not long after this adventure the good Shah Minuchir closed his eyes in death, saying:

> 'The caravan
> Goes to another city, one to-day,
> The next to-morrow; each observes its turn
> And time appointed: mine has come at last,
> And I must travel on the destined road."

But first he bade his son rule wisely in his stead, depending for counsel upon Sahm and Zal, and for strength upon young Rustem.

Now Nauder, the new Shah, was a cruel and unwise man. He took no heed of the counsels of his father, but ruled the people with such severity that they rose up against him, and prayed Sahm to govern in his stead. But Sahm was far too loyal to hearken to their proposals. "He is the king," said he, "and I am bound to do him service, though he has departed from the paths of his wise father." Then he hastened to Nauder, and with words of wisdom counselled him to rule more fitly; and Nauder listened to his advice, and so the kingdom was once more in quietness.

But meantime the hostile ruler of the country of Turan, hearing of the discontent of the people of Persia, had determined to seize the opportunity to make himself master of that land. He had a brave young son called Afrasiab, who had long desired a chance to win a name in warfare. Him he reminded of the old feud between the descendants of Selim and Tur and the Shahs of Persia, and bade him go forth against the weak young king Nauder and win the land for himself.

So a great army went forth from Turan; and as they marched they heard with rejoicing that Sahm the Warrior had been gathered unto his fathers, and that Zal his son was busy building him a tomb. Of Rustem they knew only that he was but a boy, and that he lay at that time sick with a dire disease. So they entered Persia with light hearts, and, meeting the army of the land, they fought for two whole days, till the ground was red with blood. On the third day the army of Persia was utterly defeated, and Nauder the Shah lost his head at the hands of Afrasiab the prince of Turan.

Then Afrasiab proclaimed himself King of Persia, and bade all men come before him to do homage and to bring their gifts to his feet. In these sore straits the people called on Zal to deliver them, and he managed to drive the invaders from the land. But when the sons of Nauder, whom Zal had made kings, were both dead, and there was none left of the race of the noble ones, Afrasiab returned again, and declared that he was the rightful ruler. At this the people heaped reproaches upon Zal, their former deliverer, so that his brave heart failed him, and he said: "All my life I have done for you the best I could, and never have I feared an enemy but old age. But that is now upon me, and I can no longer fight for you or advise you. There is one, however, who shall deliver you from all your foes. Look you to Rustem, for he shall save you from the hands of your enemies."

As no other deliverer could be discovered by the men of Persia, and the country continued to groan under the iron hand of Afrasiab, Zal called to him young Rustem. "My son," said he, "thou art now strong as an elephant, and fit for all the hardships of war, though thy lips still breathe the scent of milk and thy heart turns towards boyish games and gladness. Can I send thee to the war to cope with heroes?"

"I have no wish for pleasure or for a soft life of ease," answered Rustem. "Give me a horse and the club of Sahm my grandfather, and I will go forth against the enemies of my country."

So Zal gave to him the famous club of Sahm his father, and showed him all the horses in his possession, that he might choose one for himself. And as each one passed the youth laid his strong hand upon its back to test its power of bearing weight. But each horse sank under his

powerful touch and fell to the ground. At length he perceived a strong young mare, followed by a colt, with the chest and shoulders of a mighty lion, and a colour like unto his dam, of mingled rose and saffron. Stepping forward, Rustem prepared his noose to take the colt (Rakush, or The Lightning, was its name), in spite of the warning that the mare had already killed several men who had tried to seize the young horse. With a sudden cast of the noose he held him fast, but at the same time the furious mare attacked him with teeth and forefeet, biting and striking in her attempt to crush his head. Then Rustem gave his famous battle-cry, half stunning the creature with its frightful sound, and, striking her on the neck with his clenched fist, he smote her to the ground. But Rakush proved no easy captive, and it was long ere Rustem had tamed him and could say, "Now am I prepared with a horse after my own heart to join the field of warriors."

Then Zal gave him command of the whole army of Persia, and he marched against Afrasiab in great array. But Afrasiab scoffed in his heart, saying, "The father is an old man and the son but a child. It will be easy for me to become the ruler of all Persia."

Before they met in battle Zal bethought himself that the soldiers had now no chieftain to honour, no Shah to fight for. So he made inquiries, and presently sent Rustem to Mount Elburz, saying, "In Mount Elburz there yet lives a descendant of the noble ones. Go ye to him, and say, 'The land of Persia calls upon Kai Kobad to be its Shah.'"

Then Rustem rode away on Rakush, bearing his gigantic club in his hand; and presently coming to Mount Elburz, where his father had been nurtured, he saw at

the foot a magnificent palace. All round the walls was a beautiful garden, full of running brooks and tall trees; and in the midst stood a throne, on which sat a noble youth, surrounded by red-robed knights. Directly they caught sight of Rustem the knights called to him, saying, "Descend from thy horse, O stranger, and drink the cup of friendship with us." "Not I," replied Rustem, "for I am on a pressing errand. The land of Persia is encircled by an enemy, and the people cry for a king; therefore, tempt me not to stay and look upon the red wine."

"Whither and wherefore dost thou go?" they asked; "for we are the guardians of the mountain land." And Rustem answered: "I seek a king of the seed of Feridoon, the noble Shah; and if you know aught of Kai Kobad, I pray you tell it me." Then the youth who sat upon the throne bade him enter and drink with him; and when he had questioned him as to why he sought for Kai Kobad, and of all that was happening in Persia, he rose from his throne, saying, "O stranger, behold me; for verily I am Kai Kobad himself. Three nights since I dreamed that two snow-white falcons flew from the land of Persia, bearing in their beaks a shining crown, which they placed upon my head. And lo! these two falcons are Zal and his son Rustem, and I am Shah of Persia."

Then all rejoiced, and Rustem hastened to conduct Kai Kobad and his followers to join the troops of Zal, who meantime had been facing Afrasiab on the field of battle.

When the armies met, Rustem begged his father to point out Afrasiab, that he might make him the chief object of his attack; but Zal dissuaded him, saying, "Put yourself not in position to come face to face with him. His banner and his cuirass are black as night, and

the black ensign of death floats over his head. He is as strong as ten mighty men—the very mountains melt into water at the terror of his name."

But Rustem would not listen to these warnings, and urged Rakush the faster against his foe. As soon as Afrasiab saw the onrush of the mighty steed he inquired who was its rider, and they told him: "'Tis Rustem, the son of Zal. Dost thou not see the battle-club of Sahm in his hand?"

Then the two champions met in combat, and after a desperate struggle Rustem grasped his foe by the girdle and flung him from his horse, with the intention of dragging him away to Kai Kobad; but the belt gave way, and Afrasiab was rescued by his followers. That day, however, made Rustem famous in the eyes of all men. Wherever the fight was thickest he was seen, urging on his fiery horse against the foe, wielding his cow-headed club, his sword, and his noose with such deadly power that more than a thousand fell by his hand.

When night fell what was left of the Turanian army fled in confusion from the land of Persia, and Afrasiab hastened to send messages of peace to Kai Kobad. Never again in the time of this Shah did he trouble the people, and Kai Kobad reigned in quietness until his death.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVEN LABOURS OF RUSTEM

WHEN Kai Kaoos succeeded his father, Kai Kobad, upon the throne of Persia all the world honoured him as its ruling prince; and the heart of this young Shah grew proud and haughty, so that he would listen to the advice of no man, thinking that his will should be above all the wisdom of the earth. So the Evil Ones, who are always on the watch to destroy mankind, made a plan to ruin Kai Kaoos. It came to pass, therefore, that as the Shah sat in his garden, the wine-cup in his hand, and surrounded by flattering courtiers, there came to him a demon disguised as a singer, who played before him, singing always the praises of that city of marvels, Mazinderan. "Mazinderan is the bower of spring; there the sweet air sheds health and fragrance; no heat or cold is known there, but ever a genial glow of gentle sunshine. That city is a garden of delight; everywhere the tulip or the hyacinth abounds; the nightingale sings in every bush, pouring his soft, melodious song into the still night air. There each streamlet is born of the dew that falls from roses, and beautiful maidens wander in that blissful spot. True it is that he who never saw Mazinderan has never tasted happiness."

Now when the Shah heard this description he rose from

his seat and declared his intention of at once marching to take possession of the wondrous city. His warriors were horrified at his words, for well they knew the danger of the expedition. They dared not tell their master what they thought, however, but among themselves they discussed the matter with growing fear, reminding each other how no former Shah, not even the wise Feridoon or the mighty Minuchir, had ventured on the enterprise. At length they decided to send a message to Zal telling him of the mad resolve of Kai Kaoos to fight against the city protected by demons. Directly he heard this news the wise old Zal mounted a swift-footed camel, and, hastening to his master's throne, besought him in moving words to give up his intention. "It is a place of demon sorcerers," said he. "Swords are useless in that enchanted place, and neither bribery nor wisdom will avail against it. Waste not the precious blood of thy brave warriors in trying to subdue Mazinderan." But Kai Kaoos turned a deaf ear to the words of Zal, and bidding him take, with Rustem, the guardianship of the kingdom in his absence, he set off with a light heart to the Demon's stronghold. So Zal, having taken leave in heaviness, returned full of mournful forebodings to his own home.

After a weary march of nearly six months the army arrived within the borders of the enchanted country of Mazinderan. Selecting two thousand of the bravest warriors, the Shah bade them march forward against the city. "Kill," said he, "every one you meet, whether old or young, and turn their day to night; thus shall the world be freed from the Demon's art."

The army proceeded on its course of ruin and destruction, and at length reached the city, in which they found beautiful women and rich treasures, excelling even all that

the Demon had described. Messages were sent to Kai Kaoos with this information, and the king, who was encamped near the city, prepared to complete the overthrow of his enemies on the following day.

But meantime the King of Mazinderan had called the great White Demon to his aid ; and when night fell on the hosts of Persia there came a black darkness like a cloud of pitch, and hail-stones of enormous size poured down upon them, and all the army was thrown into the wildest confusion. Some were killed, many fled into the darkness ; and when morning came Kai Kaoos found to his horror that he was blind and helpless in the midst of his foes, and that, like himself, all that remained of his warriors were blinded and prisoners. Seven days passed in weeping with his unhappy followers for this terrible affliction, and on the eighth day the Shah cried from the depths of his misery : " O Zal, wisest of men, why did I not lend ear to thy counsel ! " Then from out of the darkness, like the voice of thunder, came the roar of the White Demon : " O foolish king, hast thou not heard of the power of the White Demon, who can charm the stars of heaven ? Thy mad will has been obeyed, and thy soldiers have brought death and destruction upon many, but now scarce one remains to hear thy groans, to lift a sword or stand in thy defence."

Then the great White Demon ordered that Kai Kaoos with his whole army, should be kept in close captivity, being granted only food enough to sustain bare life.

So Kai Kaoos abode unwillingly in that pleasant land, and his heart was full of bitterness. And as time passed on he began to see how foolish he had been in his self-will, and the thought of his poor blinded army, whom he had brought into their miserable state, filled him with grief. At length he bethought him of sending a message to Zal

imploring his help. With great difficulty he found a messenger who was clever enough to slip past the guard and to lay the writing of the captive king in the hand of Zal. When Zal read the sad words of that writing, and saw how his master was bowed to the earth with grief and penitence, he was beside himself with rage and pity. Quickly summoning Rustem, "See," said he, "the words which tell that Kai Kaoos is bound captive in a dragon's den! I am too old to go to his aid, so thou must take the burden of this enterprise. Unsheath thy sword, then, and saddle thy good horse Rakush; go hence to deliver Persia, and thou shalt gain immortal honour."

Then Rustem answered promptly: "My horse and sword are ready, O my father, and by God's help I will overcome the demons. But the way to Mazinderan is long, and Kai Kaoos was six months upon the road. What may not have happened to him by the time I get there?"

"There are two roads to this kingdom," replied the aged Zal. "The one by which Kai Kaoos travelled is safer, but it is very long. The other is full of dangers and difficulties, beset by lions, demons, and sorcerers; but it is possible to reach Mazinderan in seven days, if thou reach it at all."

"I choose, then, the road of peril," replied Rustem; "for though men say it is not wise to walk into the tiger's den, yet I gird my loins in face of danger, and trust in God for victory." Forthwith taking a fond farewell of his parents, he rode off to the rescue of his king.

So swift was his good steed Rakush that within twelve hours a journey of two days was accomplished, and when night fell he found himself in a forest in which was grazing a herd of wild asses. Quickly securing one of these, Rustem lighted a huge fire with dried grass and branches of trees, and, having roasted the animal, he made a huge

meal and lay down to sleep with his sword by his side. Rakush meantime was grazing a little distance off, when a rustling sound was heard among the reeds. Rustem was too sound asleep to be disturbed, but the faithful Rakush pricked his ears and snorted uneasily. Suddenly a huge lion who had lain hid among the rushes sprang upon the steed, intent on devouring him first and then his master. But Rakush fought with teeth and hoofs, and trampled him underfoot so that he died. Awakened by the noise, Rustem arose in the moonlight to see his horse standing over the body of the prostrate lion, and was aghast to think of what might have been his fate.

So he began to reprove his steed, saying, "Ah, Rakush, how couldst thou run so great a risk? Was it thy duty to fight lions? And if aught had happened to thee how could thy master ever hope to reach Mazinderan? Thou shouldst have given the alarm by neighing in my ear; and though I know thy bold heart knows no fear, I pray thee never again to fight with lions, but to awaken me at once."

Then he lay down to sleep again till morning, while Rakush stood, mournful and abashed, by his side.

Next day they travelled swiftly till they reached a vast desert, treeless and waterless, where the sand seemed made of melting lead, so hot was it to the touch. A maddening thirst came upon both horse and rider, and after a while Rustem alighted and began to wander about in search of a spring, until, almost exhausted, he lay down upon the burning sand to die. But first he prayed very earnestly that the Almighty would remember Kai Kaoos in his misery and send help in his distress. Suddenly, as he lay parched and despairing of life, a fat sheep passed by him. "Surely," said Rustem, "his watering-place is

not far off." And, staggering to his feet, he followed the animal, which led him, indeed, to a fount of water. Then he called Rakush, and they both drank their fill; and he bathed the limbs of the good horse, and laved his own face, and then bethought him of the sheep which had done him so good a turn. But, strange to say, the creature had vanished, neither was any trace of him to be found upon the sand. So Rustem knew that a miracle had been wrought for him, and rode on his way rejoicing.

Now when night came, and Rustem had killed and eaten another wild ass, he lay down to sleep. But first he charged Rakush, saying, "Beware of strife, my steed, and do not again risk thy life. Fight neither with demon nor lion, but, if one should appear, see that thou awaken me at once." So saying, he settled himself upon a bed of leaves, and soon fell asleep.

At the hour of midnight there crept out of the forest a huge dragon, eighty yards in length, so fierce that even the demons dared not pass by his lair. Seeing the sleeping man and the horse a little distance off, he rushed upon the latter. But Rakush, mindful of his master's orders, ran to his side and neighed and stamped so loudly that Rustem awoke. But when he looked about him in the darkness he could see nothing, for the fiery beast had vanished; and he was angry with Rakush, and reproached him for awakening him unnecessarily. Soon he lay down again to sleep, and when the dragon saw him slumber he rushed out again from his lair; and once more the good horse awoke his master by stamping and neighing; yet again did Rustem look about in vain for the cause. When this had happened three times Rustem fell into a great rage, and said: "I told thee to alarm me if thou sawest a dangerous enemy. and behold, thou dost delight in

depriving me of needful sleep. If once again thou dost this thing I swear by my head that I will kill thee with mine own hand and drag myself in loneliness along the road which I must traverse to Mazinderan."

Then once again he slept, and Rakush stood by his side with drooping head, for his heart was heavy at the harsh words which his master had showered upon him. Once more the dragon came forth, and the poor horse, in deep distress for his lord's danger, determined to disobey, though death should follow. Tearing up the earth with his heels, he awoke Rustem, who sprang to his feet in dire anger, and would have despatched him with his sword, when suddenly the darkness lifted and he saw the huge monster close upon them. Promptly he turned his sword against the dragon, but the shock of the onset was so great that he must have been overpowered and killed had not Rakush seized the dragon's scaly hide with his teeth.

This savage attack diverted the monster's attention, and enabled Rustem to secure an advantage. Quick as thought his keen sword descended upon the grisly head, and the hideous form lay stretched in death upon the plain. Then, filled with joy and thanksgiving, he praised his faithful steed and proceeded upon his way.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEVEN LABOURS OF RUSTEM (Concluded)

TOWARDS the evening of the next day Rustem entered the country of the magicians. It was a green and woody region, watered by gently flowing streams; and as he passed through it, hungry and weary, he came to a lovely spot by the waterside where stood a table, covered with dishes holding a most delicious meal of roasted venison, bread and salt. When Rustem saw this he did not hesitate long, but alighted quickly from his horse and sat down to eat and drink. But he knew not that it was the table of the magicians, who at his approach had made themselves invisible, and were watching him on every side from the trees and rocks.

When Rustem had finished his meal he took up a tambourine which lay upon the table, and began to sing a song about himself; of how he loved the war-path and the strife with dragons and with demons, and how the wine-cup and the rose-wreath were nothing to him beside the joys of the warrior's heart and hand.

Now this song was heard by a sorceress near by, who suddenly appeared at the hero's side under the guise of a very beautiful woman. For a while they laughed and talked together, until Rustem, pouring out a cup of wine,

placed it in her hand and bade her thank the Almighty One for the good cheer which He had provided. Immediately she heard the Divine name the sorceress grew pale and trembled, and her face and form changed on a sudden to the black ugliness of her natural appearance. Rustem, seeing her in her true character, threw his noose and held her fast, and then, drawing his sword, he delivered so mighty a stroke that he cut the demon-woman in two. When they saw this the other magicians fled with a wild shriek, for they feared the mighty arm of Rustem.

After this adventure the hero resumed his journey, until he came at length to a region of utter darkness, lighted neither by moon nor star. There was no possibility of choosing a path, so he dropped the reins on the neck of Rakush, and bade the good horse lead him where he would. At length they emerged suddenly from the gloom into a fair country bright with waving corn; and there Rustem, weary with the long night journey, dismounted on the grassy slope and lay down to sleep with his head upon his shield.

Meantime Rakush, also weary and hungry, went to graze upon a neighbouring cornfield; seeing which, the keeper of the field ran to the spot where the hero lay asleep, and wakened him roughly with blows of his stick upon the ground, demanding, with many foul words, why he let his horse feed in the green corn. Then Rustem, being wroth at this uncivil awakening, seized the fellow by the ears and pulled them from his head. Wild with terror and fury, the keeper rushed to Aulad, the ruler of the land, and besought vengeance on a black demon dressed in a leopard skin, who he said had treated him thus. So Aulad rode off swiftly with his fighting men to the spot where the stranger still lay asleep, and, awakening him

with hostile words, demanded his name and why he had dared to act thus, promising that he would promptly punish the deed. But Rustem answered calmly: "Were I to tell thee my name the very blood within thy veins would freeze with horror. Thou hast brought thy host against me; see now how I will scatter them to the four quarters of the earth." Then Aulad signalled to his warriors to attack this boasting fellow, and they rushed upon him with great fury; but Rustem met them sword in hand, and wherever he waved his arm heads rolled upon the plain, until the survivors fled from his face in all directions. Amongst them was Aulad; but Rustem pursued him, noose in hand, and ere long he had thrown the snare about him, and bound him fast. Then Aulad prepared to die; but the champion spoke gently to him, saying, "If thou wilt tell me the plain, direct truth, thou hast nought to fear from me."

"I will answer truly," replied the affrighted Aulad, "if thou wilt ask what thou desirest."

"Wilt thou point out to me the caves of the White Demon and his warrior chiefs, and also the place where Kai Kaoos is imprisoned?" "Yes, in truth I will," answered Aulad.

"Then," said Rustem, "if thou wilt do this I will make thee the king of Mazinderan. But if thou playest me false thy blood shall answer for thy lying words."

Then Aulad again swore to tell the truth, and he directed Rustem, saying, "Between two dark and lofty mountains far in the depths of two hundred caves, dwell the White Demon and his warriors. Twelve hundred of his demon troops keep watch upon the mountain brow by night and day; and whenever the White Demon moves the whole height quivers like a reed. But terrible is the way to this

dread spot. First comes a stony desert, across which no living being save the demons has ever passed. Then a wide and deep stream flows across the track, whose banks are covered with a host of warrior-demons. Canst thou, single-handed, overcome such obstacles as these ? "

But Rustem smiled a grim smile, saying, " Only show the way, and thou shalt see what one man can perform. And now lead on with speed to the place of captive Kai Kaoos."

So Aulad hastened on, still bound by a rope to Rustem's saddle-bow, and, resting neither by day or night, they reached at length the fatal spot where Kaoos had been overcome. It was midnight, and the air was full of noise and clamour ; but the darkness was lit by blazing fires, and numerous lamps burnt bright on every side. " What is this place ? " asked Rustem ; and Aulad answered : " It is Mazinderan, my lord, and the White Demon's chiefs are gathered here in council."

Then Rustem bound his captive to a tree for safety, and, lying down outside the city, fell fast asleep.

When morning dawned the champion rose, and, mounting Rakush, he threw his leopard skin about him and sought the demon chief, summoning him with a roar that shook both stream and mountain. Hearing this rude summons, the demon chief rushed out of his tent in fury ; whereupon Rustem seized him by the ears, tore off his head, and tossed it among the other demons, who shrank back with horror and fled in all directions.

Rustem meantime rode quietly back to the tree where Aulad still stood a prisoner, and, having loosed his bonds, bade him lead the way to Kai Kaoos.

Onward they passed through the deserted streets of Mazinderan, from which the demon dwellers had fled ;

and when Rakush found himself within the walls he neighed so loud for joy that Kai Kaoos heard the sound, and said to his people: "I have heard the voice of Rakush, and now are my sorrows at an end."

But his followers said among themselves: "He is surely mad." Yet again and again did Kai Kaoos insist that Rustem was near at hand. And as they stood wondering the hero himself entered the tent, and the blind Shah rushed into his embrace.

When all the news was told, Kai Kaoos remembered the peril in which they stood, and their enduring misery of blindness; and, finding Rustem was ready for any undertaking, however perilous, he said to him: "Our danger lies in the fact that when the White Demon hears of thy coming he will rouse up countless legions of demon followers, and the end will be death for all of us. It is necessary that thou storm his cavern unawares. Among the Seven Mountains it lies, and the approach thereto is guarded by troops of evil spirits. Within the deepest recess of the mountain is the hold of the White Demon himself. If thou canst conquer and destroy him we are saved, and our sight shall be restored; for wise men tell us that the warm blood from the heart of the demon, if dropped into the eye, will cure all blindness."

So, nothing daunted, Rustem rode upon his way to the Seven Mountains, with Aulad beside him as his guide. And before very long his keen eye saw the demon troops moving to and fro in front of a huge cavern that shone red and fiery, and was crowded with black and grisly spirits. Then Rustem took counsel with Aulad, saying, "Thou hast been a sure and trusty guide until now. Tell me, then, the best way to attack the demon host."

"I counsel thee to wait until the sun is high in the

heavens," said Aulad, "for then the demons sleep, leaving only a few to keep watch."

So Rustem waited until the heat of the day was very great; and then, having bound Aulad once more to the tree, he gave his mighty shout of "Rustem!" and, flinging himself suddenly upon the evil ones, he slew all who fell in his way, and the terror of his onset struck such dismay into the hearts of the survivors that they soon fled wildly before him. He was now at liberty to seek the abode of the Great White Terror himself, and, having made his way far into the mountain cleft, Rustem saw at his feet an enormous black hole, into which penetrated no single gleam of light. He stood and gazed awhile, wondering at the excessive blackness, when on a sudden the whole mass of darkness gave a great heave. Then he saw that the cavern was entirely filled with a monstrous hairy form, which lay asleep within. Shouting his war-cry in a mighty voice, Rustem at length aroused the monster from his rest, and as he issued from his lair into the sunlight the blackness changed to gleaming whiteness. Seizing a vast millstone with his hand, the demon cried: "Art thou so tired of life that thou wouldst thus invade the stronghold of the demon chiefs? Tell me thy name, that I may not destroy a nameless thing."

Then Rustem sternly spake. "Rustem am I, sent by Zal my father to avenge thy treatment of the King of Persia."

At this name the demon fell back for a moment, but, quickly recovering himself, he hurled the huge millstone upon his daring foe. Leaping lightly aside, Rustem easily evaded the missile, and, rushing in, he pierced the demon's leg with his sword. Then they embraced in a struggle so grim and deadly that the rocks shook with the

"Rustem aroused the monster"

contest, and Rustem, feeling his bones crack and blood streaming from innumerable wounds, said to himself: "If I survive this, my life must in truth be immortal."

The White Demon muttered with equal fear: "The hope of life goes from me. No more shall I be welcomed at Mazinderan."

The terrible struggle at length drew to a close, and when both the combatants were nearly exhausted the Almighty favoured Rustem with access of power, and, bringing all his mighty strength to bear, in one supreme effort he dashed the demon to the ground with such fury that life no longer breathed in his massive frame.

Rejoicing at his victory, Rustem cut out the demon's heart and returned to Aulad, who besought that he might be freed from his bonds and recompensed for all that he had done for his captor. So Rustem bade him wait until he had conquered the King of Mazinderan, when he should be made king in his stead. Then they returned as quickly as possible to the prison of Kai Kaoos, and when Rustem's coming was made known a mighty shout of gladness rent the air. Swiftly the remedy was applied to each man's eyes, and in a moment the gloom vanished and sight was fully restored.

Then the soldiers, mounting their horses and saluting their king, rode off to burn and destroy the city of their hated captivity; and meantime a message was sent to the King of Mazinderan warning him of the fate of the demon hosts, and calling upon him to give in his submission to the King of Persia.

Now the monarch was full of pride and haughtiness, and received this message very ill, saying, "I am a greater king by far than Kai Kaoos. My empire is wider, my warriors braver and more numerous. A hundred elephants of war

have I, and Kai Kaoos not one; why then should I submit to the King of Persia? Let him come forth and meet me in battle if he dare."

When the Shah had heard this bold reply he sent for Rustem, who was so indignant at the news that every hair of his body stood out like a spear. "Let me take the second message," said he in tones of wrath. So a second writing was prepared, which threatened to hang the head of the king upon the walls of his own citadel unless he agreed to the demands of the Shah.

When Rustem had approached within a short distance of the court of the King of Mazinderan a small troop of warriors was sent out to receive him. And when the hero saw them drawing near he tore up a huge tree that grew by the wayside, and, wielding it in his hand as a spear, threw it down before the astonished chiefs. Now the warriors of Mazinderan were giants, and one of these now stepped forward and offered to shake Rustem's hand. The grip of the giant was so strong that he hoped to wring off the hand of his adversary. Smiling, however, Rustem returned the grip with such power that the sinews cracked and the warrior fell writhing from his horse.

When the news of this was brought to the King of Mazinderan he was much provoked, and he ordered Kalahur, strongest and most valiant of his giant champions, to punish severely this daring stranger. And Kalahur, rejoicing, replied: "I will wring this warrior's hand with a grip of torture." But lo! when their hands met, that of Kalahur was crushed in the grip of Rustem, and the giant returned crestfallen to his master, urging him to come to terms with so terrible a foe. But the king would not lower his proud head, and bade Rustem be brought before him; and when he had gazed at his strong

limbs and mighty frame he said : " Surely thou art Rustem, who slew the White Demon ! " But Rustem answered : " I am but his servant. If thou wast to fight with my lord Rustem thou wouldst find him a host in himself. Talk not of lions, elephants, or demons ; Rustem is stronger than them all."

This he said in order to show the king his folly in resisting. But when the king had read the letter of the Shah he dismissed Rustem, saying, " Tell thy master that the King of Mazinderan will teach him humility upon the battlefield."

Then both sides prepared for battle, and a terrible fight ensued. For seven days the air was black with dust and the ground red with blood ; and on the eighth day, when it seemed impossible that the Persians should win, Rustem managed to engage the King of Mazinderan in single conflict. Fiercely they fought, and Rustem at length was getting the upper hand, when his opponent suddenly changed himself by magic into a stony rock. This stayed the battle, and Kai Kaoos, coming forward in amazement, bade his warriors drag the enchanted rock into his tent. But though all tried to move it, binding it with mighty cords, it could not be stirred from its place. Then Rustem came forth from where he had been washing his wounds, and, lifting up the great rock in his mighty hands, bore it easily across the battlefield and laid it down before the tent. Then he spoke to the stone, saying, " Come forth at once in thine own shape, or I will instantly break thee into atoms and scatter thy dust to the winds."

The king's heart quaked within him when he heard this, and he came out of the stone and stood before Rustem. And the champion brought him before Kai Kaoos, who,

reminding him of all the evil he had wrought and the lives he had sacrificed to his wicked pride, ordered that he should be put to death.

Then Kai Kaoos would have poured out many thanks to Rustem his deliverer, but Rustem said: "My lord, thanks are due rather to Aulad, who has been an upright guide and counsellor to me. Let him, therefore, be made King of Mazinderan."

So Aulad received high honour in that land; and Rustem craved only that he might return to his father. Then the Shah thanked him again and blessed him, and they returned in peace to the land of Persia.

CHAPTER IX

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF KAI KAOOS

ONE would have thought that after this terrible experience of blindness and captivity, the Shah Kai Kaoos would have been glad to pass the rest of his days in peace within the borders of his own kingdom. But his restless mind urged him after a short time to visit all the outlying provinces of his empire, and thus he found a certain king in active rebellion against him in the State of Hamaveran. Kai Kaoos at once gathered his army and subdued the rebel chief with little trouble; but before he left the province he heard that the king had a very beautiful daughter whom he kept in hiding. The eloquent description which he received of her charms caused the Shah to fall violently in love with her, and he sent an embassy to her father demanding her hand in marriage. The king was most unwilling to part with his daughter, but he dared not refuse the demand of his conqueror, and so the beautiful Sudaveh became the wife of Kai Kaoos and accompanied him to his own palace. But from that hour the king of Hamaveran plotted to bring about the return of Sudaveh and to be revenged on Kai Kaoos. When the princess had been gone seven days, he sent a message unto Kai Kaoos, imploring him to grace a ban-

quet within his palace walls. To this request Kai Kaoos readily agreed, although Sudaveh implored him not to go, saying she was certain that her father meditated treachery against him. The Shah, however, turned a deaf ear to her prayers, and proceeding to the city with his bride and a few chosen warriors, allowed himself to be entertained in most gorgeous fashion for several days But on the eighth night a cry arose from the tents of the visitors which was answered by the battle-shout of the warriors of Hamaveran. The king and his followers, taken unawares, were seized with violence and carried off to a distant fortress hidden away on the top of a high mountain.

And here they were soon joined by the faithful Sudaveh who was inconsolable without her lord, and whose refusal to return to her father so incensed him that he sent her to join her husband's captivity—a fate which in no wise abashed her, for she desired above all to comfort the heart of the imprisoned king.

Now when the neighbouring rulers knew that the throne of Persia was once more empty, they began to plot how they might seize upon it ; and Afrasiab, the former enemy of that land, stayed neither for day nor night but marched into Persia, slaying all who withstood him and making the wives and children his bondslaves. Then those who saw these things went in secret to that distant province where lived Rustem, the son of Zal, and they implored of him help to liberate Kai Kaoos. So Rustem once more threw his leopard-skin about him, and being ready for war, he wrote a letter to the king of Hamaveran, demanding the immediate release of the Shah and his followers, threatening him, should he refuse, with the fate of the white demon and of his ally the king of Mazinderan. Then the king Hamaveran was sore troubled, but with a

bold front he defied Rustem, saying that if he wished to share the prison of the Shah he might come as soon as he liked.

When he received this arrogant reply, Rustem smiled that grim smile of his, and mounting Rakush, made ready to go into Hamaveran with his army. In due time the forces met, but when the warriors of Hamaveran saw the mighty form of Rustem, their hearts turned to water and they fled from his face without striking a single blow. Then the rebel king obtained the help of two neighbouring chieftains with their armies, and all three came to conquer the champion of Persia. Undaunted by the vast numbers of the enemy Rustem inspired his followers with equal courage, and marvellous deeds were wrought on that day. As for Rustem, he rode forth into the midst of the host of the enemy and worked such havoc that in all quarters of the field men fled before his terrible might. And Rustem followed hard after the two allies of his enemy and captured both with his deadly noose. The king of Hamaveran would have met the same fate, had he not sent to beg mercy from the hero, promising to deliver up Kaoos and his warriors and all the treasure he had taken from him.

To this Rustem agreed, for that, said he, was the only purpose for which he had come. The next object was to drive Afrasiab from the land whose throne he had usurped; and this was no easy matter; for Afrasiab, knowing with whom he had to deal, promised the hand of his daughter in marriage, and a kingdom besides, to the man who should capture Rustem alive. The plan did not meet with success, however, and so many of his most famous chieftains lost their lives in the attempt that Afrasiab at last was glad to make his escape from Persia.

So Kai Kaoos returned to his throne with Sudaveh his wife, and in return for all Rustem had done, he bestowed upon him the proud title of Champion of the World.

Then Kai Kaoos determined to apply himself to peaceful pursuits; so he bade the conquered demons build for him two magnificent palaces upon Mount Elberg, and to decorate them in the most costly fashion. And so many precious stones were used to ornament their walls that the palaces were as brilliant by night as by day. But the Spirit of Evil, seeing the vanity and ambitious desires of the Shah, determined to use these to bring about his destruction. He easily persuaded the demons to help him in his scheme, and one of them, disguised as a beautiful youth, appeared before Kaoos and offered him a cluster of deep-red roses. Then kissing the ground at his feet he said: "O my lord, thou art the greatest king upon the earth and there is none like unto thee. But there is one thing thou lackest. Behold, the secrets of the sun, the moon, the sky and the whole heavens are hid from thee, for this one reason—thou canst not fly!"

Then the mind of Kai Kaoos became troubled, and he rested not until he should find some way by which he might ascend to the heavens without wings. He consulted his Wise Men and they at length hit upon this plan. A brood of young eagles was taken from the nest of the birds, and nourished till they were full grown and very stout and strong. A framework of aloe-wood was then made, and at each of the four corners a long javelin was placed upright, with a piece of goat's flesh fixed on the top. At each of the corners was bound one of the eagles, and in the middle sat Kai Kaoos, with a goblet of wine in his hand. Directly the eagles grew hungry they flapped their wings and tried to fly upward to the meat; and as

they raised themselves they carried the Shah with them. And as they could not reach their desired food they flew higher and higher, always in the hope of attaining it at last, until they rose above the clouds. But at length the strength of the great birds began to fail them, and the frame descended with a crash from the sky on to a dreary desert, where there was no one to bring food or succour to the king. At first his subjects knew not what had become of him ; but at length a band of demons was sent to seek him, and they brought the news of his disaster back to Persia. Then Rustem with two other chieftains set out to his assistance . and as they went they greatly blamed the king : so that when at length they found him, deeply repentant, in that desert land, Rustem spoke roughly to him saying : " Never before have we known such a man as thou, who art like one that is destitute of all reason and art always in some misfortune. This is the third calamity into which thou hast fallen by thine own folly ; first at Mazinderan, then at Hamaveran ; and now thou wouldst attempt to discover the secrets of Heaven itself."

Then the unhappy king wept in his misery, acknowledging his fault ; and spending forty days in penitence within his palace, he came forth a wiser and better man.

CHAPTER X

SOHRAB THE CHILD OF MANY SMILES

NOW it came to pass one day, when Rustem was hunting in a certain forest, that he killed a wild ass, and having roasted it and eaten well, he lay down to sleep. Rakush, as usual, was grazing near by, when a band of seven robbers passed that way, and seeing the noble animal, determined to take him away with them. This was no easy task, for the horse fought desperately for freedom, biting off the head of one, and trampling another underfoot before the rest managed to overpower him and lead him away. Now when Rustem awoke, he was sad at heart, for he loved Rakush more than anything in the world; and remembering his loyalty and affection, he said to himself, "He would never have deserted me in my hour of need. Some enemy hath done this; and now will I follow after him and be avenged." So he began to search about for traces of footmarks, and presently found them leading towards a certain city. Thither he took his way, and being known of the king and nobles of that place, he found them all ready to receive him at the gates of the city. But while they greeted him courteously and implored him to enter and feast with them, Rustem, still in a mood of wrath, accused them of stealing Rakush,

whose footprints he had traced to the very walls of the city. They, however, denied all knowledge of the theft; and when he began to threaten them with death and destruction the king grew sore afraid and implored him to lay aside his anger, declaring that he would himself punish the offenders the moment they were discovered.

So Rustem agreed to enter the palace in peace, and after sitting at a great banquet hastily prepared in his honour, he was led to a rose-scented couch and soon fell fast asleep. Scarcely had he slept an hour, when he was awakened by a slave girl carrying a lamp in her hand. The next moment he was astonished to see before him a most beautiful maiden, "graceful as the lofty cypress tree." "Who art thou?" asked the wondering hero, and she answered.—"I am Tamineh, daughter of the king thy host, whom no man save my father has ever yet set eyes upon. But I have heard of thee, my lord, and of the brave deeds thou hast performed, and the glory thou hast won in all the earth. And so I loved thee, lord, and sought about for some pretext to bring thee into this city that I might look upon thee. So I sent spies to watch thy progress, and to bring in Rakush thy steed, as thou layest asleep. For, said I, he will surely follow hard upon his tracks. And now, O Rustem, if thou lovest me in return, do thou ask me in marriage of my father, and Rakush shall be quickly restored to thee." Then Rustem looked upon her and loved her for her beauty and her wisdom; and on the next day, they were married, for the king was exceedingly glad to make alliance with the famous and dreaded Rustem, and all the city rejoiced to hear the news.

Now, when a few days had passed away in feasting and

merriment, the neighing of Rakush was heard outside the city gates ; and then Rustem was sad, for he knew he must depart to his own country. But he did not wish that men should know that he had taken a wife ; for all looked to him to wed a maiden of his own people. So he took a tender farewell of Tamineh, and taking an amulet made of onyx stone from his arm he gave it to her saying : "If Heaven should grant thee a little daughter in my absence, bind this onyx in her hair ; but if a son, place it upon his arm ; then shall he be strong of limb as Sahm my grandsire, and graceful of speech as Zal my father."

Then Rustem threw himself upon Rakush, and the good horse quickly bore him out of sight, leaving the weeping Tamineh to mourn his loss in loneliness. And Rustem, when he had returned to his own land, told no man what had happened in his absence.

Now in the course of time a lovely babe was born to Tamineh, a laughing boy, who smiled at the world from the moment he entered it ; and so they called him Sohrab, or the child of smiles. Mighty was he like his father, for when he was but a month old, he was as big as a yearling child, and when he grew to nine years he could fight and ride better than any grown man in that land.

Then Tamineh was afraid, for she said, "Surely Rustem will be proud of such a son and will send for him and take him from me." So while he was yet a babe she bound the onyx on his arm, but sent tidings to Rustem that a baby daughter had been born to them. And Rustem was sorrowful, for he had hoped for a brave son ; but he sent fine jewels for the child, and bade the mother rear her in tenderness, for meantime he was busy in the battle-field, and could not come to see her.

When Sohrab was about ten years of age he came to his

"Tell me, I pray thee, who is my sire?"

mother one day and said "See, I am taller and stronger than any one of the boys with whom I play, and yet, when they ask me of my race and my father's name I can answer nothing. Tell me, I pray thee, who is my sire?"

And Tamineh answered "My son, thy father's name is Rustem, and he is the greatest hero the world has ever seen." Then the boy was glad, and many a brave deed done by his father in old days was told to him. And at length he cried, "Mother, tell me where my father is, that I may go to him and fight by his side."

But Tamineh wept and said, "I have lost my husband, and now shall I also lose my only son? Seek not to find him, I implore thee, for if he knows thou art his child, he will take thee from me and from thy happy home: and then thy mother's heart will break in agony." Yet even the tears of his bereaved mother could not avail to turn Sohrab from his purpose.

Then Tamineh tried to frighten him, telling him of the might and cruelty of Afrasiab, king of the Tartars, and Persia's foe, and warning him that were it once voiced abroad that he was Rustem's son, Afrasiab would never rest till he had got him in his power. But Sohrab answered: "Never again will I hide my father's name—instead, I will march against all these tyrants—the kingdom of stern Afrasiab shall be wrenched from his dominion, and Kai Kaoos shall be hurled from his imperial throne. Then shall Rustem hold the crown and sceptre, and none shall approach my glorious sire in power and majesty."

So he made preparations to depart; first seeking a steed that should be worthy to carry him to the wars. The royal stables were ransacked for the purpose, and one after another the horses were paraded, and Sohrab tested their strength like as did his father before him; and in the

same manner each was quickly crushed under the weight of his hand. At length there trotted past him a mighty colt, none other than the foal of Rakush; and Sohrab, leaping on his back, knew that at last he had his soul's desire. And thus mounted, the youth bade his mother farewell, and rode forth to conquer the kingdom of Persia for Rustem his father, whom as yet he had not seen.

Now when Afrasiab, king of the Tartars, heard that Sohrab was preparing an expedition against Kai Kaoos his ancient foe, he rejoiced in his heart; and summoning two of his bravest chieftains he said to them, "See that ye quickly call together an army, for fate has permitted us to settle the affairs of this world. And now let me tell in your ear my purpose; but see that ye divulge it to no man. This Sohrab is the son of Rustem the Mighty, but Rustem knows him not, nor is he aware that he has a son. Let us then strengthen the hands of Sohrab and aid him to fight against the hosts of Persia; for Rustem will surely come to the aid of his country, and if fortune favours our cause the lion will perish before the onset of his fierce young whelp. Then will we turn and rend the forces of Sohrab in the day of their victory, and so will Persia fall a prey into our hands. But should the fates will that Sohrab fall at the hands of Rustem, it will still be well for us; for the mighty one will die with grief when he learns that he has slain his son." So the Tartar warriors made all haste to join the forces of Sohrab, bringing rich gifts and flattering messages from their king: whereat the heart of the youth was glad, and he marched on his way rejoicing.

Presently the allied hosts crossed the borders of Persia, hard by a fortress called the White Fort, before which they

halted. Scarcely had they done so when the Warden of the Fort came forth to meet them, with haughty countenance. Then Sohrab drew his sword and bade him tell his name and deliver up the fortress. But the Warden mocked at him saying, "Who then art thou? I am Hujir, valiant among men, and am come to conquer thee and to bring low that proud head of thine in the dust."

Then Sohrab smiled at the boastful words and challenging Hujir to the conflict, he easily overcame the elder warrior and sent him bound to the camp.

Now Hujir had a daughter named Gurdafrid, who from her childhood had been taught the arts of war. Learning now with dismay and wrath how easily her father had been overcome, shame filled her heart at the news, and she donned coat of mail, hiding her glossy hair beneath a helmet, and rode like a lion from the fort into the camp of Sohrab, shouting loud defiance.

The champions of Turan seeing how tall and strong she looked, and never dreaming of her sex, held back; but Sohrab beheld her gallant bearing with smiles, thinking her a youth of tender years and expecting an easy conquest. The vigour of her onset, however, soon undeceived him. Such showers of arrows rained upon his head that he was glad to cover himself with his shield; and when the maiden rode at him with couched lance she all but hurled him from his saddle.

Then Sohrab was wroth, and in the heat of his fury he ran with all his force against his adversary and brought her to the ground. But before he could deliver another stroke, she had shivered his spear with her sword and had leaped upon her horse again, riding off towards the fortress, for she was weary of the conflict. Then Sohrab followed hard after her and throwing his noose, he pulled her from

her horse. Off flew her helmet and down rolled great masses of beautiful hair, hiding her radiant face.

Then Sohrab stood astounded, saying, "What chance have men against this land if all the maidens of Persia are like unto thee?" Binding her fast as his prisoner, he regarded her with eyes of affection, saying, "Think not to escape, O beautiful one, for never have I made a prisoner like thee."

Then Gurdafrid said, "O my lord, if thou shouldst show me to thy army as thy captive, the warriors will surely laugh to know thou wast so nearly worsted by a woman. Hadst thou not better hide this thing from them? And now I pray thee let me return in peace to my father, and then will I give thee the fortress and all the treasure it contains." Then Sohrab, being young and chivalrous, set her at liberty and they rode together to the gates, but directly Gurdafrid had entered they were closed in the face of her companion, and the mocking laugh of the maiden from the battlements told him he had been befooled.

For a while he raged and stormed outside; but Gurdafrid advised him scoffingly to go home again, since if a woman had thus got the better of him, he could hardly hope to stand against great Rustem himself.

When at length the angry and mortified Sohrab rode back to his camp, the maiden proceeded to hold a council in which it was decided that she, with the whole garrison, should escape from the fortress by secret passages, and fleeing to Kai Kaoos, should warn him of the danger that was menacing the land. So it came to pass that next morning, when Sohrab and all his host approached the gates with intent to take the fortress by storm, he found the doors wide open and not a soul within. In vain did

he search the deserted rooms for Gurdafrid, crying, "O unhappy me, for I have lost the only being I have ever loved."

Meantime the news of his invasion had filled the court of Kai Kaoos with alarm, for a messenger had told how Sohrab was mighty of arm even as Rustem himself. And the king said, "Let us with all haste send a letter unto Rustem, the Champion of the World, for he alone can help us in this our need."

So a letter was sent, reminding the hero of all the glorious deeds he had performed for his country's sake, and imploring his instant aid now that dire peril threatened once again. And Rustem, when he had read the letter, questioned the messenger closely; and having learnt that the young invader was like himself and Sahm his grandfather, he said, pondering:— "'Tis strange that such an one should come from that part of the country of which you speak. For though Persia might produce a hero of this kind, there is no likelihood that one of hero blood should spring from that race. I myself have a young daughter in that land, and had I a son I should have thought that this was he. But she is a mere child and plays yet with childish toys; and I, alas! have no son."

Then the messenger repeated the words of Kai Kaoos, which bade him return at once with Rustem, staying not for food or rest; but the champion insisted that the officer should first feast with him. Being very tired and hungry, the man submitted, and after a heavy meal, fell fast asleep. When morning dawned, remembering the words of the king which bade him return at once, he implored Rustem to set off immediately. But once again the latter refused, saying "Fear not, for though Sohrab be as strong as Zal my father, or Sahm my grandsire, or

even as I myself, he shall yet fall by my hand. Refuse not then to eat and drink and rest here another night." Then he made a great feast which lasted without ceasing for seven days, at the end of which the officer came to Rustem and said, "O my lord, I pray thee let me at least return; for Kai Kaoos is a hard man, and his heart is full of fear concerning Sohrab. And if we delay longer he will be wroth with us to our hurt." But Rustem laughed and said, "Fear not, for there lives not the man who dare be angry with me."

Then he saddled Rakush and, summoning his warriors, he rode at last to the city of the Shah.

CHAPTER XI

SOHRAB AND RUSTEM

WHEN Rustem and his warriors approached the end of their journey a band of chieftains, who had been anxiously watching for him, hastened out to meet him and to bring him to the presence of the king. As the champion approached the throne to render homage, Kai Kaoos gazed at him in silence, his brows contracted with rage and fury, but at length he broke into furious speech saying: "Doth Rustem think himself greater than his king that he scorns my behests and tarries at his own will? Take him, I command, with yonder rascally messenger, and let them die the death of traitors."

Then a silence of dismay and terror fell upon the Court till one of those who stood by said in awe-struck tones, "Wouldst thou slay Rustem, the Shield of Persia?" But the Shah was mad with rage against him; yet only when the order was twice repeated, did an officer dare to step forward and stretch forth his hand against the hero. But Rustem dashed his hand aside and stood upright before the king's face, and answered his angry speech with words of burning wrath, saying: "O thou weak and foolish man, think not that thy past follies are forgotten: and thy present action is even baser than they. Go thou

and hang Sohrab the stranger, but think not to threaten *me* with such a death. For what is Kai Kaoos when the wrath of Rustem is stirred? Must I dread *him*, I, who owe allegiance to God alone? The warriors of this Empire would in former days have placed thy crown upon my head: but I was loyal to thee and to the laws and customs of thy land. Had I not been so, thou wouldst now have been weak and friendless in the midst of thy foes. But no longer will I bear with thy foolishness; I will leave this land, and when this stranger has ground thee under foot, Rustem shall neither know of it nor care."

Uttering these reproachful words, the champion strode from the court, and springing upon Rakush, rode swiftly away.

Then a murmur of dismay made itself heard among the king's officers, as each began to realise that this meant destruction to them and ruin to the Empire of Persia. And as the king still sat in gloomy silence they went out softly from his presence and held counsel together as to what had best be done. Bitterly did they blame the king for his violent words, as they recalled the terrible danger in which they stood, and the many times that Rustem had rescued them from peril in former days; and once again the cry went up.

"What can we do without our mighty champion?"

At length they chose out one of their number who was high in favour with the Shah, and this noble went into the presence-chamber where the monarch sat in gloomy grandeur upon his throne. And he spoke at length to the Shah, reminding him of all the glorious deeds of Rustem, and of the ingratitude just shown to him. And some looked to see the Shah strike his favourite dead at his feet;

but instead he heard him in silence to the end and then said sorrowfully: "The words that thou sayest are words of wisdom. Go thou and fetch Rustem again, and I will humble myself before him."

Then the officer hastened forth in search of the hero, and all the chieftains of Persia rode out to accompany him on his mission. After some days had passed they found Rustem riding still in anger towards his own land. Then they bowed low before him, and their leader implored him to return, saying: "Thou knowest that Kaoos is weak and wayward, and yet how quickly he repents him of his folly. If now thou wilt not forgive him, the whole land of Persia must suffer for his sake. For if Rustem come not forth to deliver it, it must assuredly be destroyed."

But Rustem only answered impatiently, "I am weary of the follies of this wretched king and I fear no one but God. Why should I be troubled by his vain words or be angered at his deeds? I will put them out of my heart, and with them the undeserved reproach he hath laid upon me, and all remembrance of the land of Persia." So saying he made as though to ride on; and the chieftains grew pale and trembled at the threatened failure of their quest. But the wisest of them said, "Bethink thee, O my lord, when the people shall hear of thy departure, will they not believe that thou didst flee before the face of Sohrab? And will they not say that if Rustem was afraid, it is no manner of use for them to strive against the enemy? So shall all Persia be trodden underfoot, and through the world the tale will go that Rustem feared to fight a beardless boy."

Then was Rustem moved by these words, and he rode more slowly and bent his mighty head in thought. Presently he said: "Rustem has never known fear nor dreaded

to look upon the battle-field. Well thou knowest that 'tis not because of Sohrab that I go, but because of insults that have been put upon me."

So they waited awhile, and followed him respectfully on his way; and presently to their joy, he turned his horse's head and rode back to the Court. On his arrival, he sought at once the presence of the Shah, and his bearing was not that of one who sues for pardon. But Kai Kaoos humbled himself and besought pardon for his angry words, so that Rustem forgave him freely, saying: "The whole world is thine and thou hast the right to demand haste in thy servants. I am thy loyal soldier till I die, and may power and might be for ever thine."

Then the Shah made a great banquet, and gave rich gifts to Rustem, and all the Court rejoiced that they were reconciled.

Next morning Rustem assumed command of the army, and an advance was made to that part of the land where the invaders lay encamped around the White Fort.

The cry of the watchman from the battlements of this fort gave warning to Sohrab of the approach of his great antagonist, and hastening thither he beheld the vast legions of Persia rolling on towards the camp from every quarter of the land like a great sea-wave. "We are lost!" cried the watchman in terror, but Sohrab laughed as one who realises his heart's desire, and calling for a cup of wine, he drank to the speedy destruction of his foes. Then descending from the tower, he summoned his warriors to a banquet, and thus did they while away the time before the approaching battle.

Meantime Rustem had asked permission from the Shah to visit the camp of the enemy, wishing to learn more about this mysterious enemy. So he disguised himself as

a fellow-countryman of the invaders, and easily passed the castle gate and penetrated into the banqueting-chamber. There he found a spot deep in shadow just within the door, and stood watching the company who were sitting at the feast. In the midst was Sohrab himself, whom Rustem quickly saw to be of hero-mould. He noted moreover that good fighting men were gathered about him. Then it so happened that one of the warriors grew weary of the banquet and was slipping quietly from the room when he saw something move in the patch of shadow; looking closer he perceived a man who was apparently hiding in that spot, and coming close up to him he said: "Who then art thou? Come forth into the light and show thy face," but Rustem gave him a blow on the neck which killed him on the spot. Then going boldly out, so that men thought it was that same warrior who had left the banquet, he returned to the camp of Kai Kaoos. And when the king asked what he had seen, the hero replied: "I have looked upon a youth tall and straight as a cypress tree, and none even in Persia is like him in bold and gallant bearing. If thou hadst seen this leader of our foes thou mightst well say that Sahm the warrior, my grandsire, had returned to earth again."

Meantime Sohrab had become uneasy because his favourite warrior returned not to the feast, and he sent slaves to seek him and enquire why he had deserted the table. But when they went forth to do so they found him lying by the entrance in a pool of blood; and they told Sohrab, but he would not believe it. Then they brought torches and showed him the dead warrior, and looking at each other with terrified faces they said: "How could this thing be?" But Sohrab cheered them and bade them return to the banquet, saying: "This is

the work of some secret enemy who has made his way into the camp. Fear not, however, for to-morrow shall surely bring our revenge."

The next morning at break of dawn, Sohrab sent for Hujir, the captive Warden of the castle, and taking him to the lofty battlements, he said: "I will give thee freedom from thy bonds if thou wilt promise to answer truly and faithfully the questions I shall put to thee. But if thou shouldst deceive me, the dungeon shall be thy portion for ever:

And Hujir said, "I will speak truth unto my lord."

Then Sohrab, desiring only to find out if Rustem were present with the oncoming hosts of Kai Kaoos, enquired, "Whose is yon tent hung with leopard skins and surrounded by elephants of war? I see a throne of jewelled gold within, and over-head floats a violet flag broidered with pictures of the sun and moon." "That," said Hujir, "is the tent of Kai Kaoos."

"And to whom belongs that other tent draped in black, over which waves a banner on which is broidered an elephant?"

"That is the tent of Tus the warrior."

"Then to whom belongs that crimson pavilion in which stands a band of mighty men? Above it waves a golden flag with the image of a lion."

"That is the tent of Gudarz the brave and of his eighty sons, who stand there all save one, and that unhappy one am I," replied Hujir.

"Whose then is that green tent yonder, in which sits a man of noble form? Taller is he, methinks, than any of the sons of earth, and beside him stands a horse as commanding as himself, and a lion and a dragon are emblazoned on his standard?"

Now Hujir knew well that this was the tent of Rustem, but since his heart was with the troops of Kai Kaoos, he feared lest Sohrab, if he knew Rustem by sight, would single him out and fall upon him unawares. So he determined not to speak his name.

Therefore he replied: "That is the tent of a chieftain come from China to help Kaoos, but his name I know not."

Then Sohrab grew very thoughtful; for his mother had bidden him look for a hero bearing a lion and a dragon on his banner, who excelled in stature all other men. After a pause he resumed his questioning and then suddenly returned to the point once more. "Dost thou see that mighty chieftain standing in the doorway of yon green tent? Is it not Rustem, whom men call the Champion of Persia?"

"I know not the name of that chieftain," replied the man.

"Where then is Rustem's tent?" asked Sohrab directly, and the lying Hujir replied, "He lingers within the borders of his own land, for it is the Feast of Roses and he is loth to depart." Then Sohrab's heart sank, for it seemed as though he were fated never to meet his father face to face; yet once again he tried to win his point, for he said within himself that strange indeed would it be if Persia were to be at war and Rustem lagged behind.

So with gentle voice he said, "Look now both to right and left, and see if thou canst find the tent of Rustem. If thou show it me I will give thee a rich reward."

But Hujir answered in his obstinacy, "Nay, my lord, Rustem is not here. That green tent is like unto his, but it is not he who sits therein; for Rustem is terrible to look upon, and when roused to fury in the battle-field neither man, nor elephant, nor leopard can stand against

him. The strength of one hundred warriors is of no avail when Rustem stretches forth his hand."

Then Sohrab exclaimed in angry scorn, "Why dost thou thus prate of Rustem's glory to me? I ask thee but to point him out and then shalt thou see a conflict worth talking of. If he breathe fire, as thou sayest, know that resistless water quenches fire as black darkness flees before radiant light."

This he said with intent to hide his purpose, for in his heart he yearned to find his father that he might hasten to his embrace. Meantime the heart of Hujir was full of dread, for he thought "young as this boy is, he is a match for the strength even of Rustem himself; and if he should overcome and slay our champion, what would become of my beloved country? I will risk his anger again and die if need be for my country's good."

So he said aloud, "Why askest thou of Rustem again and again? Thou canst not find him, but he will quickly find thee in the press of battle, and will strike thee dead for thy presumption."

At these words Sohrab's eyes flashed with fury, and he made as though he would kill Hujir, but changing his mind, he turned gloomily away.

When all was ready, and the two armies lay facing each other in battle array along the Oxus stream, young Sohrab came forth in full armour and broke fearlessly through into the Persian camp. And such was the terror he inspired by his dauntless bearing that no man dared to advance a step against him.

In a voice that sounded like a peal of thunder throughout the camp he called on Kai Kaoos to issue forth and fight with him in single combat, that the murder of his chieftain on the preceding night might be avenged.

Obtaining no answer to his challenge, Sohrab called again : "Is it thus that kings forget the deeds of honour, and skulk in hiding when they are bidden forth to fight ? Why, O Kai Kaoos, dost thou linger in thy tent ? Come forth and fight when thou art bidden ! "

The Shah was astounded beyond measure at this boldness, and his mind was in the utmost confusion when he found that his warriors were so panic-stricken that none of them would take up the challenge on his behalf. In his dilemma he was obliged, as usual, to send in haste to Rustem for assistance : but Rustem had resolved not to fight upon that day. "Let some other chieftain take up the youth's defiance," said he, "and to-morrow, if he still live, I will come forth and crush him." But not a chieftain would accept the challenge ; and in the hope of winning Rustem's consent in the end, Kai Kaoos sent a message appointing the next morning for the combat with any one who should call himself the champion of the Shah.

So that day passed, and when the first glow of dawn touched the sky, and the troops of Sohrab still lay sleeping amidst the rising mists from the Oxus, the young leader arose and betook himself to the tent of Peran-Wisa, Afrasiab's wise old counsellor. And when the aged warrior heard him approach he roused himself in haste, crying, "Who art thou ? I cannot see thee in this dim light. Is there a night alarm ? "

But the young man answered, "Nay, 'tis I, Sohrab. Restless and sad at heart, I come to thee for counsel. O my friend, thou knowest how from the first day I came against the Persians, I had hoped for one thing only —to find my father Rustem. Deeply have I longed to greet him upon some worthy battle-field, but him I never find. And now it is my hope that, in challenging the Persian

lords to single combat, if I win the day, Rustem will hear of it; and if I fail—why then, the dead need claim no sire!" Then Peran-Wisa took his hand and said:

"Sohrab, dear to me as mine own son, canst thou not be content to risk thy life in the common battle, but must thou seek the chance of single combat in order to find a father thou hast never seen? Bethink thee that if thou survive the combat, Rustem may never hear of thy prowess; for men say that he hath quarrelled with the Persian king, and dwells apart in his own land with Zal his father. But if thy heart is fixed, then go and do thy best. Yet is my mind uneasy, much I fear that danger or death awaits thee on this field;

but who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening? and who govern Rustem's son?"

Meantime, in that same morning's dawn, there came anxious messengers to the tent of Rustem, where they found the hero sitting listless at his meal of roasted sheep and bread and melons. And they implored him to come forth and take up the challenge of the stranger youth, saying:

"O Rustem, like thy might is this young man's
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.
And he is young, and Iran's Chiefs are old,
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustem, or we lose."

But Rustem answered: "Not so, for if the chieftains of Persia are old, I am older than they. Let Kai Kaoos choose one of the younger men he loves so well to fight against this youth: 'twill be a fitter match. What care I, indeed, for Sohrab's boasts! But had I such a lusty son instead of one pale girl, I

would indeed rejoice ; and I would send him forth to war in my stead, while I returned to the house of my father and hung my war-worn armour upon his walls."

Then there spake the man he loved best among the warriors . " What then will men say when they hear that thou, whom Sohrab wishes most to meet in conflict, hast turned thy back upon him ? Will they not say that Rustem's day is passed, and that he fears to lose his fame by fighting with younger men ? "

And Rustem was moved at these words, and granted their request, but as it seemed to him a thing of shame that he should match himself against this boy of unknown race, he made it clear that he would fight not under his own name, but as a stranger knight.

Then he began to prepare for the combat, choosing plain armour and a shield without device ; his helmet only was adorned with a flowing blood-red plume ; and as he walked through the camp, his steed Rakush followed hard upon his heels. The Persian chiefs urged him to go in haste, saying : " 'Tis no ordinary foe whom thou hast to fight, but one strong as the Evil One himself ; and he has bewitched us and filled the hearts of our host with dread."

In the space midway between the two camps was a little sandy plain ; and in this place, within view of the rival hosts, did Rustem take his stand, gazing with gloomy curiosity at Sohrab as he came to meet him. Very young he looked, but tall and straight as some dark cypress tree against the morning sky. And Rustem wondered who he was and whence he came, and pitying him as one fated soon to die at his hand, he beckoned to him to come quite near, and gently said :

"O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,
And warm and pleasant; but the grave is cold.
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me: I am vast and clad in iron,
And tried; and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe:
Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?
Be governed: quit the Tartar host, and come
To Iran and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die,
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou."

When Sohrab heard that deep resounding voice, and saw that mighty form planted like some tall rock upon the sand, hope filled his heart, and running forward to embrace his knees, he cried:

"Tell me I pray thee, by all thou hold'st most dear, art thou not Rustem? Speak! Art thou not he?"

But Rustem's soul was filled with suspicion at these words, and he said within himself, "These Tartar boys are cunning as young foxes; for if I now say 'Rustem stands before thee,' he will neither yield nor run away, but will find some excuse not to fight, and will feign friendship, praising me with flattering words. Then will he go away, and in days to come, perchance in the halls of Afrasiab himself, he will say with boasting lips:

'I challenged once, when the two armies camped
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords
To cope with me in single fight; but they
Shrank; only Rustem dared: then he and I
Changed gifts, and went on equal terms away.'

"And so shall shame come upon the princes of Persia and on me." Reflecting thus, he turned to Sohrab and sternly said: "Rise! why dost thou vainly question me of Rustem? I am here, whom thou hast summoned

to the fight; therefore, make good thy boast or yield at once. Is it that thou wilt only fight with Rustem? Know, rash boy, that men look upon Rustem's face and straightway flee. And if to-day he stood before thee here, full well I know that there would be no more talk of fighting for thee. Now yield thee as thou art, or else:

> Thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
> Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer floods,
> Oxus in summer wash them all away."

Then Sohrab answered in hot anger; "Think not to frighten me with threats. I am no girl to be made pale by words. Yet thou hast said truly that were Rustem here, there would not be strife between us. But alas! he is far away, and we are here. Begin therefore, and do thy worst."

Then Rustem hurled his spear at the youth, which shivered to pieces against his shield, and then they fought with swords in desperate wise, till the edges were hacked like saws. Casting this weapon aside, Rustem grasped the club which only he could wield, a huge tree-trunk with unlopped branches, and brought it down with all the force of his mighty frame. But Sohrab swerved aside so that it fell thundering to the earth, and once more the champions closed together, fighting so fiercely that their armour was torn in pieces, their weapons bent, and mingled blood and sweat poured upon the ground. Then, as both stood apart for a moment's breathing space, Rustem said to himself, "Never have I seen either man or demon with such activity and strength."

"Come, thou champion," cried Sohrab gaily, "come when thou art ready and let us try the combat with our bows and arrows."

But with these weapons they were both so skilful that

neither could get the better of the other. Then they tried wrestling, hand to hand, but though Rustem used such force as might have shaken a mountain, he could not move Sohrab from the ground. Forthwith the young man seized his mace, and struck Rustem such a blow that he reeled backward and nearly fell. And as the youth laughed in his triumph, the champion slowly recovered himself and said, "Night cometh on; let us resume the fight to-morrow."

"Not so!" cried Sohrab tauntingly, "I have given thee enough. I will now let Kai Kaoos feel the edge of my sword." So he rode towards the king's tent, killing all who stood in his way; but Rustem, who had thought to ravage the lines of the Tartar hosts meantime, remembered that his chief duty was to protect the Shah, and returning, prevailed upon Sohrab to call a truce for the night. "To-morrow," said he, "if thou art still for war, thou shalt fight again with me alone."

Sohrab was at length weary with the conflict, and so the words of Rustem prevailed, and the two champions retired to their tents.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEATH OF SOHRAB

WHEN all was still in the camps, Kai Kaoos sent for Rustem to question him concerning the strange skill and power of his young adversary. And he was much moved when Rustem frankly said, "I have met none like him, for he seems to be made of iron. With sword and arrow and club have I fought him, and yet he is still unhurt. In skill as a warrior he is my superior and Heaven only knows what will be the result of to-morrow's fight."

Sohrab, meantime, had sought the tent of Peran-Wisa, to whom he said with anxious look, "This old man has the strength and appearance of Rustem. God forbid that he should prove my father!" But the counsellor, whose aged eyes were dim, said: "I have often seen Rustem, and I am persuaded that this champion is not he, though he is very like him."

So Sohrab's mind was at peace.

Yet again when the morning dawned, and the two men faced each other upon the level plain, the heart of Sohrab was strangely full of affection for his opponent and he would willingly have stayed his hand. But Rustem, grimly desirous of avenging his previous lack of success, quickly opened the combat, with a blow from his mighty

club delivered with such terrific might, that as Sohrab leaped lightly aside once more, it fell with a force that brought the hero to his knees, with fingers clutching the sand to save himself from complete discomfiture. Now was the moment for Sohrab to draw his sword and pierce the hero, as he knelt dizzy and choked with sand; but he stood smiling by and said:

"Thou strik'st too hard: that club of thine will float
Upon the summer floods, and not my bones.
But rise, and be not wroth; not wroth am I;
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul.
Thou say'st thou art not Rustem: be it so.
Who art thou then that canst so touch my soul?
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too;
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men;
But never was my heart thus touched before.
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart?
O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!
Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears
And make a truce and sit upon this sand,
And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustem's deeds."

But while he was speaking, Rustem had risen erect, trembling with rage, his giant form covered with dust, his chest heaving, his lips foaming. Very soon his passion overflowed in burning words:

"Girl! Nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curled minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words,
Fight! Let me hear thy hateful voice no more!
For thou hast shamed me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks and thy girl's wiles."

Then Sohrab finding all his hopes were in vain, prepared again for the contest. In grim earnest the two men tugged and strained together like lions, while the red blood and sweat flowed down upon the sand. At length

young Sohrab with a mighty effort raised the champion in his arms and dashed him backward upon the sandy plain. Then he sat upon the mighty frame and drawing his dagger, prepared to cut off the head of his vanquished foe. But Rustem said: "Dost thou not know that by the custom of this country, when a champion is thrown for the first time his head is not severed from the body, but only after the second fall?"

Then Sohrab was glad in his heart at the excuse, and, sheathing his dagger, he allowed his enemy to rise and both men went in silence to their tents.

When Peran-Wisa heard what had passed, he bewailed the conduct of Sohrab. "Thou hast ensnared the lion and then set him at liberty only to devour thee," said he. But Sohrab replied: "Twice hath he been within my power, and the third time I shall surely slay him, for he is evidently my inferior in skill and strength."

The third morning dawned, and with strength renewed, the heroes faced each other for the last time. Bright sunshine blazed upon the plain, but as the deadly conflict recommenced, the sun was darkened over the spot where they were fighting, and as if in sorrow for the tragic strife, a wind arose and "moaning swept the plain." Yet where the hosts were drawn up on either side it was still broad sunshine; only where those two swayed and grappled was there gloom and darkness.

First Rustem aimed a thrust with his spear which pierced the shield of Sohrab nearly through; but meantime Sohrab with a stroke of his sword, sheared away the blood-red plume from his adversary's helmet. And ever the gloom grew darker, thunder pealed, and lightning cleft the sky; Oxus alone pursued indifferent his wonted course.

Then Rakush, who all this while had stood near his

master, gave utterance to a dreadful cry, like the roar of "some pained desert lion"; and all the troops heard it and quaked with fear.

Again Sohrab struck, and this time his blade shivered into pieces on the iron helmet, leaving the hilt only in his hand. Then Rustem raised his giant frame: his fierce eyes glared, and shaking his spear on high, he shouted his dread battle-cry:

"Rustem!"

At that word Sohrab staggered aghast and stood bewildered. His covering shield drooped in his nerveless grasp, and ere he could regain the power of resistance the spear of Rustem had found fatal entrance to his side.

> And then the gloom dispersed; and the wind fell,
> And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all the cloud;
> And the two armies saw the pair;
> Saw Rustem standing, safe upon his feet,
> And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then Rustem bitterly spake: "So thou didst think to slay a Persian lord this day, and that great Rustem would come down to fight with thee! See, thou art slain, and by an unknown man!"

But the youth gasped fiercely out: "Thou art unknown, 'tis true, but 'tis not thou who hast slain me. Rustem hath dealt my death blow, for that name unnerved my arm—that and something in thyself which troubled my heart and made my shield to fall. But hear thou this, thou mighty unknown man:

> The mighty Rustem shall avenge my death!
> My father, whom I seek through all the world,
> He shall avenge my death and punish thee!"

And Rustem unbelieving said:

> "What prate is this of fathers and revenge?
> The mighty Rustem never had a son."

But Sohrab answered with choking voice, "Ah yes, he had, and that lost son am I. And one day when this news reaches the home of Rustem, where he sits afar, he will arise and seek vengeance for an only son. Deeply will he grieve, but most I pity her, my mother Tamineh, who, in her distant home, never more will see her Sohrab return from the warriors' camp." Then Rustem pondered these words, for they brought to his mind the scenes of other days, his dark-eyed wife and their pleasant life "in that long distant summer-time." There at his feet lay dying upon the sand a youth, of just the age that his own son might have been, and the sight suffused his eyes with tears: "Oh Sohrab," he murmured, "thou indeed art such a son as Rustem would have loved. But thy words bear not the mark of truth, for know that Rustem never had a son.

> One child he had—
> But one—a girl; who with her mother now
> Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us."

Then Sohrab, his strength ebbing fast, raised up his arm and cried, "Behold this onyx, given by Rustem to my mother, that she might bind it on her babe."

Then Rustem looked and saw the onyx stone, on which was cut that bird of wonder which had reared Zal in earlier days; and the sight struck with cold horror at his heart. He stood for some moments and then grief found utterance!

"O Boy—thy father!" His voice choked there, and falling down by Sohrab's side he lay awhile as one dead. But ere long Sohrab roused him with loving words, and when the champion realised afresh his awful deed and grasped his sword with intent to slay himself by the side of his son, he prevented him, saying:

"Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say; 'My son!'
Quick! quick! for numbered are my sands of life,
And swift; for like the lightning to this field
I came, and like the wind I go away."

Then Rustem clasped him to his heart with many tears; and the opposing hosts looked with awe upon the unwonted sight. And Rakush came close to them with head bowed to the ground and mane sweeping the sand; and big tears of compassion fell from his soft dark eyes. Sohrab stroked the famous horse whose name he knew so well, and pitying his father's overwhelming grief tried to comfort him saying: "Death comes to all men; why, then, this grief?" He then implored his father to send away the forces without the horrors of a battle and to carry him to his own place, the home of white-haired Zal, and there to raise over him a tomb of which men might say:

"Sohrab, the mighty Rustem's son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill."

But Rustem wept sore, saying: "How shall I live without thee, O my son—if only I might die in thy stead.

But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age;
And I shall never end this life of blood."

But Sohrab answered very slowly and solemnly: "Thou shalt have peace in the day when thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,

Returning home over the salt blue sea
From laying thy dear master in his grave."

And so he died; and the bereaved father covered his

The Death of Sohrab

face with his horseman's cloak and sat motionless by his side.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead;
And the great Rustem drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now mid their broken flight of steps
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand lay Rustem by his son.
And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loosed, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog; for now
Both armies moved to camp, and took their meal;
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward, the Tartars by the river marge;

And Rustem and his son were left alone.

But the majestic River floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight . . .
—till at last
The long'd for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORY OF UNLUCKY SAIAWUSH

WHEN all the land was quiet again two of the warriors of Kai Kaoos went out to hunt one day. And as they rode through a forest they came upon a maiden of great beauty, who had left her father's home and was come out in the world to seek adventures. Then both the warriors fell in love with the beautiful girl, and each wanted to marry her. This led to a long and angry discussion, and one of their followers suggested that since they could come to no agreement, the quarrel should be referred to Kai Kaoos. So the warriors came with the maiden before Kai Kaoos, and when he had looked upon her he settled the quarrel by marrying her himself.

Now in due time a son was born to Kai Kaoos, and they called him Saiawush. Tall and strong and fleet of foot was he; but the wise men shook their heads when they read the message of the stars at his birth. For it was written that the child should be always unlucky, and that even his virtues would lead him to ruin. When the news was noised abroad that a son had been born to Kai Kaoos, Rustem aroused himself from the grief into which he had fallen after the death of Sohrab, and sought the palace of the Shah. There he spoke gently to Kai

Kaoos, and asked permission to take the child to his own province and to train him as a brave warrior. And Kai Kaoos was pleased that his son should be reared at the hands of the famous Rustem ; and he sent him away willingly.

Under the care of his guardian young Saiawush grew up strong and mighty, so that he cared not to hunt anything smaller than a lion or a leopard. He was skilled also in horse-riding and archery, and knew how to rule a kingdom. At length he came to Rustem one day and said, "Permit me, I pray thee, to go before the Shah, my father, that he may see how thou hast trained me."

This request pleased Rustem, and he made great preparations and sent Saiawush to his father with an escort befitting so noble a prince ; and all the land rejoiced to see him. As for Kai Kaoos, he was so overjoyed at his son's appearance that he gave rich presents unto Rustem, and to the young prince a high place at his court.

Now it came to pass that after Saiawush had passed several years in unwilling idleness, Afrasiab, King of the Tartars, seeing that Kai Kaoos grew lazy and luxurious in his old age, and that he loved the company of women more than warriors, invaded the land of Persia with a mighty host. And the Shah was wroth, for he had no wish to exchange his ease for the battle-field. Yet when his Wise Men, remembering how twice before he had brought the kingdom into danger by his want of wisdom, entreated him not to go forth with the hosts, he grew still more angry, saying that he alone could win success in the approaching struggle. Then Saiawush bethought himself that here was a fine opportunity for winning a great name ; and he besought his father to let him lead the host, as the son of a king should do. Kai Kaoos was

torn between his desire to grant the request of his son and fear lest he should come to grievous hurt in the warfare. At length however, he acceded to the request, but he bade Rustem go forth with Saiawush and protect him in time of danger saying, "If thou wilt guard him, then can I rest in peace; but if thou turnest away thy face, then must I take up arms myself."

Rustem agreed to this readily, for though he was growing old, he still loved the battle-field; and, moreover, Saiawush was almost as dear to him as Sohrab would have been, had he lived.

Then the hosts of the Shah made them ready, and the swift horses were led out and the armies of the warriors came together from all parts of his dominions. And Kai Kaoos was proud to see his son ride at their head, and bade him return in the joy of victory. So they passed into the land where Rustem lived, and there they tarried awhile to gladden the eyes of the old man Zal. Then passing on to the country which had been seized by the invaders, they soon came face to face with a huge host led by the brother of King Afrasiab; and the armies fought in that place till, on the fourth day, the Tartars fled in confusion back to their own land. Then was Afrasiab very wroth when he heard this news; but at length, wearied by his anger, he lay down to sleep. In that night the watchers outside his chamber trembled, for they heard the king shout and roar like one possessed.

Then they fetched unto him his brother, who found the king lying on his chamber floor filled with the horror of a dreadful dream.

Summoning instantly his Wise Men, Afrasiab recounted unto them this dream. He thought that his tent was pitched in a forest, from the trees of which writhed

countless serpents, and everywhere he stepped a serpent raised its head to strike. The air above was dark with the wings of thousands of eagles which hovered overhead, the ground beneath was dried up with heat, and a whirlwind came and blew down his tent. When he would have stepped forth, a river of blood flowed past his feet, and he saw his faithful soldiers lying slaughtered on the ground in all directions. Then it seemed that he was taken prisoner and led before Kai Kaoos ; and beside the throne of the Shah stood a noble youth, who, leaping forward, plunged a dagger into his side : and with the pain of the wound he awoke.

Then his brother tried to soothe him, telling him that evil dreams often turned out to be omens of good luck : but Afrasiab turned to the Wise Men, who stood ill at ease before him, and with many threats and promises prevailed on them to tell him the truth. At length they said : "O King, the portent is an evil one. For the hosts of Persia are led by Saiawush, son of Kai Kaoos, and if thou shouldst fight against him thy warriors will all be slain ; and even if thou shouldst manage to kill him in the combat, yet the ruin of thy crown and throne will not be averted. We counsel thee, therefore, to make peace with this young prince, who else will bring sure destruction upon thee."

So Afrasiab determined to follow this advice as speedily as might be ; and he forthwith sent silver and gold and jewels to the camp of Saiawush with this message :

"Let not our hostilities disturb the world ; but rather by our alliance let us bring peace to our borders."

When the king's brother brought these words to the young prince, Saiawush was much amazed ; and, suspecting treachery, he called Rustem to him and asked his

advice. And Rustem bade him hold a secret council, but meantime to detain the ambassador and entertain him with banqueting and other delights. So they did this, and the king's brother was full of joy in the camp of Saiawush and desired greatly that his mission might succeed.

Thus eight days passed, and then Saiawush received the brother of Afrasiab in audience, telling him that he desired not war but peace with the great king; but, that this peace might be a safe compact between them, he demanded a hundred hostages, chosen warriors and relations of Afrasiab, as pledges of the alliance between them. So the king's brother ordered that the swiftest camel be saddled and that this demand be laid before Afrasiab; who when he heard it, was filled with doubt and dread, for he said: "If I agree to this, I lose my best and bravest warriors; and if I refuse, the Prince will come against me with his hosts, and the dream that warned me will become true, to my destruction." This determined Afrasiab at any cost to make peace with the young prince, and he forthwith sent a hundred of his choicest warriors, allied to him by blood, unto the camp of Saiawush. Moreover, he made a proclamation and recalled his troops and gave back unto Persia the land which he had taken. So peace was made, and the ambassador departed, and Rustem and Saiawush consulted together as to how Kai Kaoos would take the news. And the prince remembered his father's hasty temper and unwise deeds, and said to his counsellor: "If my father wished not for peace, but rather for the destruction of the hosts of Afrasiab, his anger will kindle when he hears of the compact we have made with the king. What, then, shall we do?"

And Rustem answered: "I will bear the news unto Kai Kaoos, for verily he is wiser now than in former days, and he will shower honours on his son for the way in which he has carried out this mission."

So Rustem set off to the palace of the Shah, and Rakush bore him swiftly on his way so that very soon he stood before the king. And he told all that Saiawush had done, and how he had filled the heart of Afrasiab with fear and forced him to conclude a treaty that left the finest of the Tartar warriors in his hands.

But, unluckily for Saiawush, Kai Kaoos had set his heart upon the conquest of the Tartars, and he raged and stormed when he heard of the peace that had been made. He reminded Rustem of all they had suffered in former days at the hand of the Tartar king, and declared his thirst for vengeance. Saiawush, said he, had acted in weak and cowardly fashion; and when Rustem said that he had advised him thus, he reviled the warrior for the words he had spoken. Finally he bade him return in haste to Saiawush and bid him, despite the treaty of peace, to kill these hundred hostages and follow after Afrasiab and utterly destroy him and his host. At these words Rustem drew himself up proudly to his full height, and, looking the king straight in the eyes, said:

"Hear my words, O King, and keep thyself from further evil. For I tell thee that Saiawush will never break his treaty with Afrasiab, nor destroy hostages which have been entrusted to him."

But Kai Kaoos had utterly lost control of himself, and he reproached Rustem for his evil counsel and raged at him for these words of his. Moreover, he told him that now he was old he was no longer of use to Persia: let him return, therefore, to his own home, and another

captain of the host should be sent as counsellor to the prince.

Then great anger rose within Rustem's breast, and, returning words of scorn and reproach to the king, he turned his back forthwith upon the throne and marched to his own kingdom, in disgust at the treatment he had received. And Kai Kaoos sent another chieftain unto his son, bidding him return at once to the Court with his hundred hostages, while the chieftain himself led the Persian army against Afrasiab.

When he heard these tidings, the unfortunate Saiawush was full of anger and dismay. "If I follow the commands of my lord the king," said he, "I shall be dishonoured in the eyes of men, for I shall have broken my pledged oath to King Afrasiab, but if I refuse, he will surely kill me or send me into exile." And he called the wisest of his warriors and laid the matter before them, reminding them of the former follies of Kai Kaoos, and of this above all, that he had done what he set out to do, and had driven the Tartars from the land, and yet had won no honour, but only blame. Then the captains advised him to send quickly to Kai Kaoos, telling him that he was willing to renew the war, and meantime to return the hundred hostages to Afrasiab. But Saiawush would not agree to this, saying: "I have made a peace, and I will not be the first to break it. Rather will I send back to Afrasiab the hostages he hath given me and go away into hiding from my father's unjust wrath."

So he sent a letter to King Afrasiab, bidding him note that he had refused to terminate the alliance in spite of his father's commands, and praying him that, since he could not return to the Court of Persia, to give

him a safe passage to some place where he could neither be found by his father nor hear of that father's unwise deeds.

When King Afrasiab received this message he was amazed, and forthwith took counsel with Peran-Wisa, the aged counsellor, who advised him most strongly to send kind messages to Saiawush, who was nobly suffering for what was right, and to receive him as a son at his own Court. "For," said he, "one day this prince will rule over the land of Persia, and in that day shall the Tartars and the Persians lie down together in peace."

So Afrasiab wrote a letter to the prince, saying: "I made terms of peace with thee, not with thy father; with him I have naught to do. Come to me, then, as my son; and if thou wishest for peace and retirement I will give thee a province for thine own. But bethink thee: thy father is old and his days are numbered: with Rustem's aid Persia will easily fall into thy hands, and if thou wishest for warfare an army shall be thine." When he read these words Saiawush determined to accept the king's invitation; but first he sent a letter to Kai Kaoos, saying that he had done all his father commanded him, and that his sole recompense had been a flood of angry words. Therefore, since nothing he did gave pleasure unto the king, he should depart from his land altogether. This done, he chose three hundred tried warriors, and with them rode away to the Court of Afrasiab.

Now when Kai Kaoos received these tidings he was filled with dismay and wrath. He cursed Afrasiab and he cursed his son; but he spoke no longer of revenge or warfare.

Meanwhile the arrival of Saiawush at the Court of Afrasiab had been heralded with all kinds of honour and

flattery. As the prince walked from the city gates unto the palace, gold and incense were scattered on his head with cries of,

"Thy presence gives joy to the land,
Which awaits thy command;
It is thine! It is thine!
All the chiefs of the State have assembled to meet thee,
All the flowers of the land are in blossom to greet thee!"

The aged Peran-Wisa came out to meet him with a train of snow-white elephants, carrying precious gifts; and he prepared to lead the prince before Afrasiab, bidding him be content and glad of heart and to remember naught that he had heard against the king, for though his fame was evil his heart was good.

When Afrasiab looked upon the prince he loved him for his strength and beauty, and, embracing him, he said: "From this day forth two great kingdoms are welded in friendship." A golden throne was then set up for Saiawush by the king's side, and a beautiful palace was given to him, and much silver and gold; and so dearly did Afrasiab love the prince that he would scarcely let him out of his sight, and was for ever talking of him by night and day. And thus a year sped on, at the end of which old Peran-Wisa came to Saiawush with words of counsel, saying, "This land is now thy home, and if thou makest Afrasiab thy father indeed, no harm can ever come to thee. Go to him, therefore, and ask the hand of his daughter Ferangis in marriage; and perchance, if a son be born to thee of the line of Afrasiab, he shall be ruler over both this country and the land of Persia."

So Saiawush asked for the hand of the fair Ferangis in marriage, and Afrasiab was so overjoyed that he gave him not only his daughter, but a whole province, with numbers

of horses, camels, and elephants as well. Fortune seemed now indeed to smile upon Prince Saiawush; but, alas! the fulfilment of his unlucky fate was nigh at hand.

Before settling down with his wife in his far-off province Saiawush busied himself in selecting a beautiful site for his palace. At length one was found in all ways delightful, on the top of a high hill, shaded by giant trees and watered by crystal rivulets. So charming was this spot that Saiawush proceeded to build around the palace a garden-city, where his people might have space to play as well as work. When completed it was indeed a beautiful retreat, and all who lived therein were full of joy and sunshine, save one alone; and, that strange to say, was Saiawush himself, who could not forget the estrangement from his father. Moreover, the Wise Men told him that this very city of delights would lead to his destruction.

Now there was one at the Court of Afrasiab who had always burned with secret jealousy of Prince Saiawush; and this was Gersiwaz, the king's own brother; and when he heard of the garden-city which Saiawush had built, he determined to destroy him, that his power should no longer be greater than his own. So he obtained leave of Afrasiab to visit the prince; and the king was glad that he should go, and sent many presents and kind messages to his son-in-law. Gersiwaz, having arrived at the garden-city, laid the presents before Saiawush, who was so pleased to see them and so busy with affairs of state that he omitted to treat the visitor with all the honour and ceremony that the latter thought fitting, and thus the hatred of Gersiwaz was increased. He noted with jealous eye the care with which Saiawush ruled his army and his province, and the power that he had over the inhabitants; and when he returned to the king, and Afrasiab began to

question him eagerly concerning the prince, he made his face grave and his voice seemingly full of sorrow as he answered: "O King, think not that Saiawush is what he pretended to be in the days when he lived in fear of thee. He is grown proud and arrogant as he is artful and ambitious. Ferangis thy daughter has also changed towards thee. They have collected a huge army, and their purpose is to be reconciled with Kai Kaoos and to overthrow thee utterly."

At first Afrasiab entirely refused to hear a word against his adopted son; but gradually, as Gersiwaz persisted in his statements, the poison worked in his mind, and he fell into silence and sat in gloomy thought upon his throne. Seeing this, his brother artfully referred to the knowledge of the country possessed by the Persian prince, and the advantage this would give him should he be allowed to join the enemies of Afrasiab; and then at length the king roused himself, and ordered Gersiwaz to go again to Saiawush and to bid him visit the Court of Afrasiab with his wife, that they might feast together.

Gersiwaz was glad at these words, for he saw that the king's suspicion was aroused; and he hastened to deliver the message to the prince, who received it with respect, saying that Afrasiab, who had been a father to him, deserved his instant obedience. Accordingly he bade his wife, Ferangis, prepare herself, and they made ready to journey to the Court at once. Then Gersiwaz said to himself: "This will not do; for when my brother sees him he will forget all that I have said, and there will be love between them as of old."

So he suggested to the prince that there was no need of such haste—a more convenient time would suit the

king as well ; but Saiawush only answered ; "The king hath summoned me, and I obey."

Then Gersiwaz tried another plan. He pretended to be racked with secret grief ; and when Saiawush pressed him for the reason, he answered : "Would that a happy ending awaited this journey of thine ! For, though I have no right to tell thee, the ear of thy father-in-law has been poisoned against thee, and he awaits thy coming only to throw thee into his deepest dungeon. Why, then, seeing that thou hast this army at thy right hand, shouldst thou meekly put thy head within the noose ? Say that thy wife is ill and that thou canst not leave her ; and I will try to soften the heart of the king on my return, and when all is safe I will send for thee to come." And the words of the deceiver seemed good to Saiawush, and he wrote words of excuse to Afrasiab, even as Gersiwaz had suggested.

Then Gersiwaz returned to the Court. But he did not give the letter of Saiawush to the king ; instead he told him that the prince refused to come, and that he had spoken evil of Afrasiab, and had threatened speedily to bring his dominion to an end. And the old king was very wroth, and, calling together his army, he set out to march against Saiawush to destroy him. Now Gersiwaz still feared the consequences if Afrasiab should meet his son-in-law face to face ; so he sent a message secretly to the prince saying, "Flee for thy life, for my counsel avails not with the king, and he is sworn to destroy thee."

When Saiawush heard this he went in to Ferangis and bade her farewell, telling her to call the son who should be born to her by the name of Kai Khosroo. Then ere he mounted his charger, whom he loved, his tears fell

on the creature's neck, and he whispered in its ear and said :

"Be brave and wise, my horse, and let no man put bridle or saddle upon thee till the day when Kai Khosroo, my son, shall ride to my avenging."

Then with his three hundred warriors of Persia, he rode boldly forward to meet the angry king, and when he asked why the battle had been put in array against him, Gersiwaz interrupted with violent words and accusations, which the prince in vain denied. For the deceived monarch, looking upon him, hated him for his supposed treachery, the more because he had loved him so dearly. Without further ado Afrasiab bade his followers fall upon the traitor, and as Saiawush, mindful of his oath to keep peace between them, would not suffer his own men to draw their swords in his defence, he was quickly taken prisoner and secured in bonds, while his Persians lay around him in the sleep of death. Then Afrasiab, in his blind wrath, ordered that his head should be struck off, but the people pleaded so hard for the life of their prince that Afrasiab for a moment relented. Meanwhile Ferangis arose from her bed of sickness, and making her way to her father's presence, entreated him to spare the life of her dear lord. And when he would not heed her, but only grew more angry at her words, she said with uplifted hand: "Hear my words, O King! If thou killest Saiawush, who has ever been true and loyal to thee, thou wilt become thine own enemy and bring destruction upon thy land. An avenger will arise of thine own seed, and one of Persian blood shall bring about thy fall."

But the king's anger was increased by these words, and he ordered that his daughtershould be cast into a dungeon. Whereupon Gersiwaz gave a sign to those who held the

unfortunate Saiawush, and they killed him with one blow; and where his blood fell men say there sprang up a tree of marvel, whose leaves were for the healing of many people. It is also said that at that moment a great tempest arose and a mantle of black darkness covered the face of the earth.

Then Afrasiab would have had Ferangis also put to death; but Peran-Wisa, his counsellor, sternly rebuked him, saying, "Wouldst thou direct thy vengeance upon thine own daughter? Thou hast killed one innocent—add not another to the list, or the whole world will cry thee shame. And if thou hast forgotten a father's duty, give her into my charge, and I will keep her with a father's care in my own house."

And Afrasiab, relenting, answered: "Take her to thy home; but when her child is born see that he is brought to me at once." So Peran-Wisa carried off Ferangis to his home, and soon a son was born to her, whom she called by the name of Kai Khosroo; and almost immediately Peran-Wisa took the child and committed him to the charge of some peasants who dwelt on the slopes of a high mountain.

Now it came to pass that after a while Afrasiab remembered the words of Ferangis, that destruction should come upon him through the son of Saiawush, and at first he had it in mind to kill the babe when it was brought before him according to his command. But when it came not he sent for Peran-Wisa, and asked him concerning the child. And the old man answered: "My lord, the young boy dwells afar among the mountains, knowing nothing of his own birth nor of the evil done to Saiawush, his father; and not even his mother knows the place where he abides. Suffer that this be so, O King, that trouble may not come upon thee because of him.'

Afrasiab saw that these words were wise; and his heart was softened within him when he remembered the love he had felt for Saiawush. Moreover, he had suffered much in his mind since the child's father had been so cruelly murdered.

So he abandoned his cruel plan, and Kai Khosroo grew up among the shepherds of the mountain, and no man knew him for a king's grandson. But Peran-Wisa thought often of the words of Ferangis, and of how ruin and destruction were to fall upon the kingdom of Afrasiab through this child. And his heart yearned towards him, as it had yearned toward Saiawush his father.

When Kai Khosroo was about fourteen years of age the shepherds of the mountain sent a message to Peran-Wisa, saying, "Come and give direction concerning this boy; for he is brave and valiant as any prince of the land, and we can no longer keep him in subjection."

So Peran-Wisa journeyed to the mountain-side; and when he saw how tall and brave and handsome the lad had grown, he could not forbear to embrace him tenderly. But the youth said: "I marvel that thou who travellest as a man of high rank shouldst embrace the son of shepherds."

Then Peran-Wisa, careless of his words, said: "No shepherd's son art thou, O prince, but the heir of kings"; and he told him his father's story. Then as Kai Khosroo would no longer stay in the mountains, the old man dressed him in fitting robes and brought him to his own house and to his mother's arms. Now this could not long be hid from the knowledge of Afrasiab; and even as Peran-Wisa was pondering how best to act for the safety of the boy there came a messenger from the king bearing a letter which said: "My mind misgives me when I remember

the child of Saiawush, and I have done foolishly to let him live so long. For I have been warned in a dream that he shall work the destruction of this land. Send him, therefore, to me, that I may kill him, and so be safe from danger at his hands."

Then Peran-Wisa bethought himself of a plan to save the boy, and he saddled his horse and rode swiftly to the king's palace, and stood before Afrasiab with these words: "O King, I have found the son of Saiawush, who has been brought up by the shepherds of the mountain. But have no fear concerning him, for though he is fair of face he hath no wisdom; indeed, he is little better than an idiot, Hurt not, therefore, a hair of his head, but suffer him to return to his flocks."

Afrasiab rejoiced to hear these words, but lest there should be some deceit he answered: "Bring him before me, that I may judge of his want of wisdom."

To this Peran-Wisa, though anxious as to the result, was obliged to agree. But first he schooled the boy how to appear foolish and weak of wit before the king, his grandsire.

Then Kai Khosroo rode to the Court of his grandfather, wearing a golden crown upon his head and the royal girdle about his waist; and the people shouted with joy at sight of him, and honoured him as a prince. But Afrasiab looked with dismay on his height and strength and manly vigour, and he regretted that he had not put an end to him when he was yet a babe. Then, when Kai Khosroo had saluted him respectfully he began to question him, saying, "Shepherd boy, tell me how thou knowest day from night? What dost thou with thy flocks? How many of the sheep and goats canst thou count?" And the lad replied: "There is nothing

here to hunt, and I have not with me my cords and bow and arrows."

The king was astonished at this strange reply: but he remembered the words of Peran-Wisa, and, smiling, asked: "What quantity of milk dost thou take each day from the herds?" And Kai Khosroo answered: "Tiger-cats are dangerous, and have strong claws." Then Afrasiab smiled more broadly, and said: "Tell me what is thy mother's name?" and he answered: "No dog dares to bark when a lion threatens him."

Yet once again Afrasiab questioned him and said: "Dost thou desire to go forth into the land of Persia and be avenged on the enemies of this land?"

And Kai Khosroo answered: "When a leopard appears in the path of a brave man, his heart quakes with fear."

Then Afrasiab was satisfied that the lad was altogether weak of wit, and he bade Peran-Wisa take him back to his mother, for he no longer feared that he would work harm unto the land.

But as Kai Khosroo returned on his way, the people called down blessings upon him and upon Saiawush his father, and curses upon the head of Afrasiab the tyrant.

When the boy reached the abode of his mother, Ferangis took him to the site of the city which his father had built, and showed him how lions and reptiles now inhabited that place of loveliness; she showed him also the place where Saiawush had met his cruel death, and the tree of marvel that had sprung from his blood. And the young Kai Khosroo pondered these things deep within his heart.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMING OF KAI KHOSROO

WHILE all these things were happening in the kingdom of Afrasiab the news of the death of Saiawush had been brought to his father Kai Kaoos, who sorrowed so that his head was bowed to the earth with woe, and all his people mourned with him.

But Rustem, the prince's foster-father, grieved most of all, and for eight days no man dared speak to him; for he turned his face to the wall and did neither eat nor drink. On the ninth day he called his warriors together and, mounting his swift horse Rakush, he rode to the Court of the Shah. Heedless of the fact that it was contrary to the custom of the land for the king to receive him at a time of such dire mourning, he made his way in the royal presence, and thus addressed him:

"See, O King, what evil thou hast wrought by thy want of wisdom! Woe unto thee, I say, for the fate thou hast brought upon thy son! From this time will I know neither rest nor pleasure until I have avenged his cruel death."

And the king could find no words to answer.

So Rustem, turning his back on Kai Kaoos, strode out of the palace and gave orders that the army be made

ready; for he said: "The whole earth shall tremble before me when the sound of my trumpets is heard in the land."

The news that Rustem had taken the field soon spread to the kingdom of Afrasiab, and the old king sent forth his best-beloved son to lead his hosts against the avengers. In the battle that ensued Rustem marked out the king's brother from among the chieftains, and he was seized by his warriors and brought before him. The luckless prince found no mercy at the hands of his relentless foe, and he was forthwith despatched in the same manner as Saiawush had been put to death. Then was Afrasiab beside himself with rage and grief, and he, in his turn, swore vengeance against the hosts of Kai Kaoos, and led out his entire army to meet Rustem. And a mighty champion named Pilsam, who was brother to Peran-Wisa, came to the king and asked that he might challenge Rustem to single combat; whereupon Afrasiab said to him: "If thou subdue Rustem I will give unto thee my daughter and half my kingdom with her."

But Peran-Wisa warned him of his rashness, telling him that though he was young and mighty and his opponent old and worn with years he was no fit match for the Champion of the World. Pilsam, however, would not hear his words, and full of confidence, he rode out to meet Rustem. The champion was black with wrath that this venturesome warrior should dare to challenge him, and he rode furiously upon him with such want of care that Pilsam was able to aim a mighty blow at his head. But though the sword was broken with the stroke, not a hair of his head was hurt. Then Rustem urged on Rakush, and, unhorsing his opponent with the greatest ease, he seized him by the girdle and, lifting him shoulder-high,

flung him into the midst of the hostile camp, at the feet of Afrasiab himself. At the same time he called with a voice of thunder, saying, "Behold thy glorious conqueror, and give to him thy daughter and thy treasure! Remember, too, thy treachery to Saiawush, and never look for aught but undying hatred from mankind!"

And no man dared answer him a word.

At length for very shame the king could no longer brook such insolence, so he rode forth to meet his enemy at the head of his hosts; but his heart was heavy, for much he feared that his good fortune had forsaken him. In the fight that followed, Rustem had very nearly made the king his captive; but Afrasiab just managed to leap on the back of a swift horse and make good his escape. Then all the army of the Tartars fled before the face of Rustem, leaving much treasure behind; and Rustem followed hard after them, so that they dared not return to their own land. And Afrasiab fled far away, saying to Peran-Wisa as he rode, "Let us now take the child of Saiawush on our journey and put him to death, that he too may not rise against us."

But the old counsellor would not let him do this, saying, "Nay, let us not kill him, but send him away into a distant land, that the men of Persia know not of his existence." So Kai Khosroo and his mother were carried off into a far country; and Afrasiab himself lay hidden in a distant land. And Rustem ruled the kingdom of the Tartars for seven years; and he plundered and spoiled the land in return for the evil that had been done to Saiawush. At the end of that time his warriors wearied for their own country; moreover, they reminded Rustem of the follies of which Kai Kaoos was capable if he were left alone; so he decided to abandon the kingdom of his

enemy and return to Persia; carrying with him all the riches of the land.

Now when Afrasiab learnt that his kingdom had been despoiled and that Rustem had left it desolate, he came forth from his hiding-place and called together his scattered army with the message: "Cursed be the man who comes not forth to avenge the ruin of his land upon the Persians!" The fiery summons brought together a great host which followed Afrasiab to Turkestan, whence they proceeded to harry the land of their foes, so that for seven years the people of Persia suffered many ills. To add to their troubles, a great drought fell on the land, and the fields were dried up; all this time the army had no one to lead them, for Rustem abode in his own home.

At length, as the warrior Gudarz lay one night, he thought a Good Spirit came to him upon a rain-cloud. "If thou wilt deliver thy land from misery and from the hand of Afrasiab," said he, "send out Gew, thy son, to search for Kai Khosroo, the son of Saiawush, who lies in hiding in a distant land. For he is a hero youth, the son of a noble race, and from him alone shall deliverance come to Persia."

Then Gudarz arose and sent for Gew and told him of his dream, and bade him leave not his saddle till he had found the son of Saiawush; and Gew, obedient to his word, set off upon his journey, taking with him only his horse and sword, for it was easier thus to pass through the land of the Tartars without rousing suspicion as to his errand. And as he passed along he asked men who walked alone in solitary places if they knew where Kai Khosroo was to be found; and if they answered that they knew not the name, he struck off their heads that his secret mission might remain unknown in the region of his foes. Many

days did Gew the son of Gudarz wander to and fro in the search for Kai Khosroo ; but he could learn nothing concerning him. Thus seven years passed on, and he became as thin as a skeleton, eating nothing but the flesh of the wild ass, and clothed only with an ass's skin. And when he had all but given up his quest in despair he came one day to a forest, and, wandering through its paths, reached a fountain, and saw sitting there a beautiful youth crowned with flowers and holding a wine-cup in his hand ; and the heart of Gew leaped up within his breast, for he saw in his countenance the likeness of Saiawush.

Fearing, however, to be disappointed again, he approached in silence ; but the youth smiled at him, saying, " Hail to thee, Gew, and welcome art thou in my sight. Tell me, I pray thee what news thou hast of Gudarz thy father, of great Rustem, and of Kai Kaoos, the king. Do they look eagerly for tidings of Kai Khosroo ? "

Then was Gew utterly astonished at these words, and said :

" O young prince, tell me who hath told thee of Gudarz and Rustem and of Kai Kaoos ? And how didst thou learn my name ? "

And the prince answered : " From my mother I have heard of those of whom my father told her ; and before his death my father Saiawush foretold that the hand of Gew, the warrior, should bring me forth and lead me to the throne of Persia."

Then Gew said : " Show unto me the royal mark, that I may be sure thy words are true."

So Kai Khosroo bared his arm and showed the mark of royalty with which every babe of the kingly line of Persia was born ; and when Gew saw this he embraced the prince and did homage to him. Then he mounted Kai

Khosroo upon his own horse, and, walking before him with a naked sword uplifted in his hand, he brought him to the city of Saiawush and to the arms of his mother.

Meantime Afrasiab had grown to fear yet more intensely the vengeance of his grandson which had been foretold; and he sent for Peran-Wisa, taking no denial, and ordered that the youth be found and forthwith brought before him. Now it so happened that in their quest the king's servants passed through the city of Saiawush, and Ferangis quickly guessed their purpose. They had left some of their horses, and she noted especially one, the beautiful horse, Bezad, which her husband had bred for his own use, and had ridden till his death. When these men reached the home of Kai Khosroo they were told that a Persian horseman had come many days before and had carried off the youth; and with this news they returned to Peran-Wisa.

Now when Ferangis had embraced her son and given Gew a hearty welcome, she said: "Without doubt Afrasiab will never rest till he has found thee, my son; we must therefore flee before he sends his army to carry thee away. Go now, therefore, to the top of yonder mountain, and thou shalt find a beautiful green meadow, and in it the horses of Afrasiab grazing. In their midst thou shalt see Bezad, the battle-horse, who will start and neigh and make to run at thee with open mouth. Go boldly up to him, however, and embrace him, and whisper thy name in his ear; and when he knows who thou art he will let thee saddle and mount him, and thou shalt escape from the hand of thy wicked grandfather."

So Kai Khosroo did as she advised him. And when the horse Bezad saw the saddle and bridle of Saiawush he made as though to tear the holder of them to pieces;

but when he heard the name of Kai Khosroo he sighed, and tears fell from his bright dark eyes at the remembrance of his dead master, and he gladly allowed the young prince to saddle him and to leap on his back. Then Ferangis dressed her son in his father's armour and she herself put on a coat of mail; which done, with Gew by their side, they rode swiftly towards the land of Persia.

Now when Peran-Wisa heard of their escape he was troubled, for he feared that he would be dishonoured in the eyes of his master because he had not fulfilled his commands. So he sent three hundred chosen warriors in pursuit of the fugitives, bidding them to bind the prince fast and to bring him back in chains; and so quickly did they ride that they soon overtook them, and they found Kai Khosroo and his mother fast asleep by the roadside, for they were weary with the journey. The faithful Gew, however, was keeping guard, and when he saw the hostile band approach, he leaped on Bezad's back and, with valour born of his faith in the high destiny of the prince, he killed or put to flight the whole troop.

When the remnant returned to Peran-Wisa, the old man was full of wrath. "What!" said he, "three hundred warriors to fly from the face of one man! Had Gew possessed even the strength of Rustem and Sahm combined, ye could scarcely have met with such disgraceful rout."

Then he ordered all the force under his command to get ready, and prepared to overtake and seize the fugitives himself. By this time the latter were very weary with the toilsome march, and could only proceed a short distance each day; so he soon managed to overtake them; and, as fate would have it, both Kai Khosroo and Gew were fast asleep, while Ferangis kept watch.

When she saw the banner of Peran-Wisa floating in the air, she hastily awoke the two young men from sleep. But Gew implored Kai Khosroo not to go forth to the combat, saying, "Shalt thou, who hast never known the toils of war, run the risks of combat? Remember that thou art destined to be King of all the world. Seek not to risk thy precious life, but let me face the enemy alone. For if I die, my father has seventy-eight sons like unto me; but shouldst thou fall Persia is lost indeed."

To this the prince most unwillingly agreed; and by Gew's request he went to the top of a high hill, that he might view the combat.

Then Peran-Wisa lifted up his voice and said unto Gew: "Thou didst once defeat three hundred of my soldiers; now shalt thou see what punishment I will give thee for that deed." But Gew replied boldly, saying, "Cannot a lion overthrow a thousand kids? Now will I conquer this host also and send thee bound to Kai Khosroo. And I will stain the earth with thy blood, and thus shall avenge the cruel death of Saiawush. Thy land also shall perish, and the name of Afrasiab shall be wiped out."

When the old man heard these words he began to shake and tremble like a reed; for though his heart was bold, his soul was heavy with fear for the things that should come upon his land through the evil that Afrasiab had done. And he said "Go! I will not fight with thee this day."

But Gew asked fiercely: "Why?" And on he rushed to the conflict.

One after another fell before his sword, and at length he threw a noose around the neck of old Peran-Wisa, and brought him prisoner to Kai Khosroo. Then he sped

quickly back to the conflict, and fought on with unabated strength until he had put to flight the remnant of the hostile army.

Meantime the aged prisoner had faced the prince and his mother with sad but haughty countenance. No mercy did he ask at their hands, but he gave an old man's blessing to the youth, and mourned in woeful words the death of Saiawush. And he said: "Had I been nigh to Afrasiab on that dreadful day thy father's blood would never have been spilt. I, too, it was who twice saved thy life, and once that of Ferangis thy mother. Yet now I must die at thy hands."

When Kai Khosroo heard this, his heart was full of tenderness for the good old man; and Ferangis wept full sore. And when Gew approached she reminded him of all they owed to Peran-Wisa, and she pleaded for his life.

But Gew said: "Lady, I have sworn to crimson the earth with his blood, and I am dishonoured should I break my oath!"

Then Kai Khosroo bethought himself, and said: "Thou shalt not break thy oath, O lion-hearted one. Pierce now the lobe of Peran-Wisa's ear with the point of thy dagger, so that his blood may stain the earth; and then shalt thou be free from thy oath."

So Gew did this, and they took the old man and mounted him upon a swift charger, binding him thereon, and let him go to his own land, enjoining him that none but his wife should release him from his bonds. So Peran-Wisa rode away, blessing the name of Kai Khosroo; and the prince, his mother, and Gew continued their journey.

Meantime Afrasiab himself, raging at this long delay,

had prepared an army, and was following upon the track of Peran-Wisa's troops. But his heart sank within him when he heard of their destruction at the hand of one man ; and when he came up with Peran-Wisa bound upon his charger, and learnt the full extent of the disaster, his fury overcome him, and he bade the old man depart from his sight.

Then he hurried forward, swearing that he himself would destroy both Gew and Kai Khosroo, and his daughter Ferangis with them.

Meantime the fugitives had reached the banks of the Jihun, the deep and wide river which lay between them and the land of Persia ; and there they found a boatman sleeping by the side of his boat. And Gew awoke him in haste and bade him carry them across the river as quickly as possible. Now the man was a greedy fellow, and perceived that their haste was urgent, so he said : "Why should I carry thee across for naught ? Give me that fine black horse, however, and I will do so."

"I cannot give my favourite horse," said Gew.

"Then give me that maiden who rides with you."

"That is no maiden, but the mother of the youth."

"Give me, then, the golden crown he wears upon his head." "That cannot be."

"Thy coat of mail, then."

Then Gew waxed wroth, and said : "Thou art a fool, and knowest not what thou sayest. Keep then thy boat and go to sleep again." And, turning to the prince, he said : "We have no time for delay, and this fellow grows more and more impudent. Thy ancestors in old days swam rivers in their coats of mail. Art thou afraid to attempt the same ? "

For answer, Kai Khosroo urged Bezad into the

swollen river, and Ferangis and Gew followed close behind. The passage was full perilous, but at length they reached the other side and hailed the land of Persia with joy.

They were not a moment too soon, for scarcely had they performed this feat when Afrasiab with his army came up to the banks of the river.

He questioned the boatman as to what had occurred, and his heart fainted within him at the courage and spirit of the young prince, who had thus escaped from his clutches. Meantime the news had been brought to Kai Kaoos, and he came out to meet his grandson with all his host; and he received the prince and his mother with warm embraces and every honour that the land could afford.

From that day Kai Khosroo took up his abode in the land of Persia, and Kai Kaoos, being old and weary of ruling the kingdom, and seeing how the people rejoiced at the coming of Kai Khosroo, made a proclamation declaring that he should be heir to his throne and rule the land after him. But some of the nobles of Persia murmured when they heard this thing, saying, "We will not have the seed of Afrasiab to rule over us." Then one came to Kai Kaoos and said: "Thou hast another grandson, Friburz by name. Why should he not be king instead of Kai Khosroo?"

And the Shah made answer: "It is not meet that the son of Saiawush be overlooked."

The nobles, however, continued to quarrel about the matter; and some were for Friburz and others for Kai Khosroo: and the land was divided in the strife.

At length they came again to Kai Kaoos, and one said: 'O King, we owe allegiance and honour to thee whilst

thou still holdest the sceptre ; but when thou layest it aside it is to Friburz that our obedience shall be given."

But others said : "Saiawush was the eldest son of the king, and he was unjustly murdered. Let this be remembered, O King, and see that Kai Khosroo is set in his place."

And they grew so angry with each other that it was all the king could do to prevent them coming to blows in his presence. Then Gudarz stood forth and said :

"If Afrasiab should hear how the land of Persia is thus divided he will swoop down and overwhelm us with the sword. Do thou, O King, put an end to this quarrel. Call Khosroo and Friburz both before thee and give them a task which shall decide between them. Let the wisest and the bravest only be thy successor to the Persian throne."

The plan seemed good to Kai Kaoos who, being stricken in years, had been sorely tried by the conflict.

After due thought he said to his grandsons : "Upon my borders stands a fortress which no man hath ever conquered, for it is inhabited by demons, and fire is continually flashing forth from it. Go each of you with an army against this fortress and he who shall win it from the Demons shall be the ruler of Persia."

Then Friburz begged eagerly that he might be the first to go : and this being granted him, he set forth with a band of those nobles who favoured him, accompanied by a large army. But when they reached the fort they saw to their dismay that the very ground seemed on fire on every side. Flame issued like fiery tongues from the walls, and the hot wind blew as though it came from a burning furnace so that, even as they stood some distance off, a number of the soldiers fell dead with the heat. As

they drew nearer they found to their astonishment that the whole fort hung in mid-air like a burning sphere, without a trace of gate or door, or any means of entrance. For a week they remained near that dreadful spot, hoping to find some means of attack, and at the end of that time, scorched and half dead, they returned in sadness to the Court of Kai Kaoos.

Then Kai Khosroo set forth with Gew and Gudarz to try his fortune. And when he drew near and saw the burning fort reddening the earth and sky with its flames, he said to himself: "This is the work of Demons."

Now years before he had dreamed a dream, in which the spirit of God came to him and told him of a magic charm by which he might bring to nought the Spirits of Evil, wherever they might be found. And remembering this, he wrote the name of God upon a leaf of paper, fixed the charm upon the point of his lance, and, coming close up to the blazing fort, flung it over the walls. Then all at once the red fires died away; there was a noise like unto a thunder-clap, and all the world was in darkness. By the prince's orders thick showers of arrows were then shot in the direction of the fort; and when light returned the demons were in rapid flight, while the fortress shone out calm and bright with a great gate in the midst. And having sacked the Demon's hold, Kai Khosroo returned to the Court of his grandfather with great store of treasure.

Then Kai Kaoos perceived that the prince was not only a valiant warrior, but that he was learned in the arts of magic; and when he made this known, all Persia was glad and acclaimed him as heir to the throne. And because he was aged, and weary of ruling the kingdom, Kai Kaoos had his grandson crowned king while he yet lived, and Kai Khosroo ruled the land so wisely that all

men's hearts were turned to him; and the land was at peace.

Now when he had sat but a little while upon the throne, the nobles of Persia came from provinces far and near to pay him homage. And amongst them was Rustem the Champion and the aged Zal; and they rejoiced to see the young prince. And Rustem reminded old Kai Kaoos of the cruel end of Saiawush his son and his own foster-son, and declared that his murder was not fully avenged while Afrasiab yet lived. Then the Shah called unto him Kai Khosroo, and required of him an oath that he would not rest until the power of Afrasiab were destroyed.

So Kai Khosroo swore by the sacred fire that he would avenge his father's death; and forthwith he called together his nobles and bade them make ready their armies, and marshal them before him that he might see that they were fit to attack the Tartar hosts. And upon a certain day the young King rode out upon an elephant into the midst of the camp, wearing a crown of gold and a cloak of gold cloth covered with precious stones. In his hand he held a silver ball, and before him was set a gold cup; and he threw the silver ball into the cup of gold. When they heard the sound the armies passed in turns before the king. Friburz was the first to ride forth with his host. He was seated on a flame-coloured horse, while his banner flashed with gold. Then followed Gudarz with his band of mighty sons, under a banner bearing the figure of a lion. Many another followed under banners of varying devices; and the air resounded with the din of hoofs, the clashing of tymbals, and the tinkling of the bells on the trappings of the elephants of war. And Kai Khosroo blessed the warriors, and promised rich gifts of jewels and cloth of gold to those who should be bravest in the fight; and he

gave the command of the whole army to Tus the warrior, saying unto him, "Lead out my hosts against Afrasiab and strive against him with all thy might; but lay not a hand upon any save those who take up arms against thee. And to this take special heed, touch not the land of Kelad, nor pass through its borders, though it be convenient for thee. For in Kelad dwells my half-brother Firoud, grandson of Peran-Wisa, with his mother, and I will not have harm come nigh him where he dwells in happiness; for he hath done no harm to any of Persian blood." And Tus promised obedience to the words of Kai Khosroo.

So the army set out, and after a long and toilsome march came to the edge of a great desert where there was neither shade nor water. One road led through the midst of it, and another turned off through the land of Kelad, which lay between them and the abode of King Afrasiab. And when Tus saw that the land of Kelad was fair and well-watered, and that the desert was very dry, he disregarded the words of Kai Khosroo his master, and commanded the army to pass along the pleasanter road. In vain did Gudarz, wise in counsel, warn him, saying: "If thou dost not obey the commands of Kai Khosroo, trouble will surely fall upon us." Tus only laughed, saying, "Be not afraid; for Kai Khosroo looks with favour upon all I do."

Now Firoud was young and without experience in matters of warfare, and when he saw this great host marching upon his land, he was sore afraid, and sent for a Wise Man to advise him. And the Wise Man said: "This is the army of thy half-brother, which is marching upon thee and upon all the subjects of Afrasiab, to avenge the death of Saiawush, thy father and his. But since thou art also

the son of Peran-Wisa's daughter, thou canst not hope for mercy at his hands."

Then Firoud strengthened the walls of his castle, and standing upon the ramparts and looking down upon the plain, he saw the countless multitude of soldiers, and was yet more afraid. So he went for counsel to his mother. "What shall I do now that this dread army hath come out against me?" he anxiously asked. And his mother answered: "Fear not, O my son, for this army is sent by thy half-brother to avenge thy father's death. For this I have longed many days, but never until now has the opportunity arrived. But it is not meet that a stranger such as he who rides at the head of the hosts should lead the army to victory, for this place is due to thee, as thy father's son. Seek out, therefore, among the Persian host one who bears the name of Bahram, for he was thy father's friend, and make thyself known to him; and so shalt thou lead the Persian hosts against Afrasiab."

Then Firoud was glad, and he held his head high, although he was young and without experience. And he went up to a high spur of the mountain on which his castle was built, and with his Wise Man joyfully counted and distinguished the banners of the Persian host. But it came to pass that Tus lifted up his eyes and saw them upon the mountain-side, and how they closely regarded the army of Persia, and seemed to count them; and he was very much displeased, and said unto Bahram, the son of Gudarz: "Go hence and see what manner of men those are that spy upon us from the mountain-side; and if they be of Tartar race, bind them and bring them before me, that I may sweep them from my path."

So Bahram rode up the mountain-side; and Firoud, beholding his haughty air, was angered, and said:

"Who is this that cometh against me as though I were a thing of naught? Behold, I will show him that I am of royal race, and not one to be treated in such fashion in mine own land."

Then the Wise Man bade him be patient and gentle with the lordly stranger; but he would not heed.

The voice of Bahram ascended before him, bold and confident. "Who art thou who lookest down from on high and spiest upon the army of Persia? Dost thou not fear the wrath of the mighty Tus, the leader of this host?"

But the words angered Firoud, and he said.

"Talk not to me as though thou wast a lion of the forest and I but a meek ass of the desert. For thou art not my better, either in strength or courage, and I have more right to stand here than thou hast. Bridle, therefore, thy tongue, and, if thou wilt be reasonable, answer the questions I shall put to thee."

Then Bahram was impressed by the brave words, and he stood where he was and looked up to the youth, as he sat upon the mountain crag, and said: "Say on; for thou art in the sky and I abide still on the earth."

So Firoud began to question him concerning the different parts of the army and of the chiefs who led them; and Bahram told him who they were. Then the young man said: "Why is not Bahram, the son of Gudarz among them, and why dost thou not mention his name?"

And Bahram replied: "Whence knowest thou of Bahram and of Gudarz, and why dost thou ask concerning them?" Then Firoud answered; "I too am of Persian blood, for my father came from that land; and when I questioned her, my mother bade me seek for Bahram, the son of Gudarz, who was my father's friend."

Then Bahram marvelled, saying, "Art thou indeed

Firoud, the son of Saiawush? Lay bare thine arm, that I may see the sign of royalty."

So Firoud uncovered his arm and showed the mark of the kingly race; and Bahram rejoiced, and embraced him warmly; and they talked together on the mountain-side. And Firoud told all his plans, and how he would make a banquet for the army, and when they were rested and fed he would lead them against Afrasiab to avenge the death of Saiawush his father. But Bahram was troubled at these words, and said to him: "O brave young prince, thy desires are good in themselves, and I will bear them to Tus. But I fear for his answer, seeing that he is an angry man and proud of heart; and I think he will not suffer another to lead the army in his stead; for his desire is always to be first in all things. But I will do my best for thee, and if he hear my counsel I will return again to thee, but if another comes, trust him not, for trouble will be nigh at hand for thee."

Then Bahram returned and came to the tent of Tus, and told him of all that had taken place; but Tus, when he heard of the desire of Firoud, was mad with rage, and refused to believe that he was the son of Saiawush, saying that to no man alive would he give up the command of the army. And he summoned his warriors, and bade them go at once and put this presumptuous stranger to death as a spy and a deceiver.

But Bahram said unto them: "Beware how you lift your hand against the son of Saiawush, the brother of Kai Khosroo. Remember the words of the Shah, that no harm was to come nigh his half-brother, and take heed, lest his anger fall upon you."

Then the warriors refused to go out against the prince; but Tus mocked them, bidding them not be afraid of one

young man, and stormed at them for not obeying his command. At length Rivniz, his son-in-law, arose to do his bidding, and rode forth alone to the mountain.

Now when he drew nigh, and Firoud beheld his threatening sword and hostile mien, he said to his Wise Man: "Behold, Bahram does not return, and this stranger comes in his place with unfriendly intent. Shall I, therefore, slay him or his horse?"

And the Wise Man answered: "Slay thou the man himself, that Tus may know it and repent that he did not give ear unto thy words of peace."

Then Firoud raised his bow, and Rivniz fell dead from the saddle. Back to the camp galloped the frightened steed, and when it stopped before the tent of Tus, the leader of the Persian host grew black with anger, and thirsted for revenge against Firoud. Then he sent forth his own son against him; and the youth rode up close to Firoud; but when he would have fought with him he fell dead, transfixed by the prince's spear; and once more a riderless horse returned to the tent of Tus. And the wrath of Tus flamed out at the sight, and without further ado he called for his charger and spurred him across the plain to kill Firoud with his own hand. Then the Wise Man said to the prince: "It is Tus himself who rides forth against thee, and thou canst not withstand the might of his arm. Retire, therefore, within thy castle walls, and let us see what fate will decree for us."

But Firoud would not hear him, saying angrily,

"Why should I fear to fight with Tus?"

Then the Wise Man said: "If thou art determined to fight against him, see that thou kill him not as thou hast done the others. For thy brother Kai Khosroo would be

greatly angered against thee if thou wert to destroy the leader of his army, and his men would all arise against thee to avenge his death. Shoot, then at his horse: for Tus is of noble blood, and will not fight on foot; and if thou stay his charger, perchance he will not return to trouble us again."

So Firoud shot his arrow against the great black steed on which Tus rode; and so deadly was his aim that the horse fell at once, shot through the heart. And Tus was forced to return on foot to the camp, raging against Firoud. Then all the nobles were wroth with the young prince, saying, "Whether he be of the race of the royal ones or no, he has no need to treat us with such contempt. The consequences of his deeds will be ill for him."

Then Gew, bravest of the warriors, rode forth against Firoud, and the prince was sad at heart, saying, "Why will these men persist in showing me a hostile countenance when all I ask is to be received in peace and honour? Surely they are devoid of reason that they act in such a manner. Tell us, O Wise Man, who this new warrior may be."

And the Wise Man said: "Gew the son of Gudarz, bold as the lion and swift as the eagle, rideth against thee, clad in the armour of Saiawush thy father, against which no arrow can prevail. Shoot, then, his charger, for thy weapon can do naught against the man himself."

So Firoud shot once again, and the horse of Gew fell dead to the ground, compelling his rider to return on foot to the camp, which he did in gloom and anger. And when Byzun, his son, saw this, his wrath burned like fire, and he cried: "Why should we suffer this at the hands of one man? Give me now thy armour, the armour of Saiawush, and I will go against this fellow

and will avenge the blood of the sons of Tus." When Firoud perceived that another foeman was riding forth against him he again questioned the Wise Man as to who the new comer might be.

"He is Byzun, the only son of Gew the valiant; and he too is clad in the armour of Saiawush thy father."

So once more Firoud aimed his arrow at the horse, and again the shot took fatal effect. But Byzun sprang to his feet and rushed up the mountain-slope, crying in a loud voice, "See thou, young man, how Persian warriors can fight on foot!"

Then the Wise Man persuaded Firoud, and brought him inside the castle gates; and the prince went to the top of the wall and flung down stones on his adversary, who shouted to him as he stood, "A brave man art thou who fleest before a single enemy! Whence is thy courage flown that thou vauntedst just now?"

But when Byzun returned to the camp he spoke highly of the valour and skill of the young prince, saying it was of no use to contend with him. Tus, however, would not hear his words, saying, "I will not rest until I have overthrown the castle and destroyed the upstart who hath killed my two sons."

Now in the night that followed that self-same day the mother of Firoud dreamed a dream of ill-fortune for her son, and came weeping to him. "Fate is against thee, O my son, in this matter," she said. "I pray thee make peace with these men while there is yet time."

And Firoud answered sadly, yet boldly," I know in my heart, O my mother, that I am doomed to perish in my youth even as my father did. But I will not ask mercy of these Persians, nor lick the dust at their feet."

When morning was come, the whole host of Persia

moved against the castle of Firoud ; and, seeing this, he led his little band of warriors outside the gates to fight with them. But his men were quickly overpowered, and though he fought like a lion, he could do naught against such numbers. Then he turned to re-enter the castle gates ; but Byzun and another lay in wait for him to prevent his entrance. Springing upon Byzun, he would have slain him ; but the other struck him from behind with a great club, so that he was only just able to stagger within the gates and close them behind him before he fell dying at his mother's feet. Then, as she raised his head, he told her that the Persians were following hard after him, and bade her escape with her women. But she would not leave him until he had breathed his last. Then she made a great fire, and piling on it all the treasure that lay within the walls, she turned all the horses loose on the mountain, and having thus spoiled the castle for the Persians, she ran a sword through her own body and fell dead at the feet of her son.

CHAPTER XV

RUSTEM THE DELIVERER

SO it came to pass that when the Persians had broken down the gates and made their way into the castle, they found there both the mother of Firoud and her son lying dead upon the ground. And seeing this they stood still, and Bahram wept over the body of the dead youth. Then, turning fiercely upon Tus, he reproached him with bitter words, saying, "Thy haste and fiery nature hath wrought this evil. For now is there slain a prince of the royal house of Persia, and how wilt thou answer for it to Kai Khosroo? Moreover, by thy ill-management thou hast lost thy two sons." And Tus wept also, saying, "I have sinned indeed, and now are evil days come upon me."

Then he gave orders that a noble tomb should be made, all scented with musk and camphor, for the body of the unfortunate young prince; and after mourning three days within his tent he proceeded with the army against the land of Afrasiab.

Meantime news had come to Afrasiab of the great army sent against him from Persia. He said: "Now indeed this fight will be to the death; for Kai Khosroo has shown that there is no forgiveness in his heart." So Peran-Wisa made ready the army; and in the meanwhile a

cruel spell of cold settled down on the country through which the Persians were passing. The ground grew white with snow and the sky with clouds; so that neither earth nor sun could be seen for many days; and all the water became ice. And when the Persians were scarcely able to endure their sufferings, on a sudden the sun returned, melting the snow and ice, which flooded the country and drowned many of the soldiers. At length Tus in despair prepared to return to Persia; but his army rebelled, saying, "Lead us forward, not backward, for we will not flee before the Tartar host."

So they marched forward, until at length the armies met, and the fortune of war inclining toward the Persians, the army of Peran-Wisa fell back as though discomfited. But in reality they were intending to make a night-attack.

That same night did Tus, rejoicing in his victory, make a great feast to all his men; and many of the soldiers drank wine so that they became sleepy and confused, and slept at their posts with armour laid aside. Tus himself sat drinking in his tent with some of his officers, when Gudarz came running swiftly with pale face and eyes afire, crying:

"Is this the time to feast and drink, when the Tartars are in our midst?"

In vain did Tus try to rally his army. The warriors were too heavy and confused to know where, and whom to attack; and the Tartar host found them an easy prey, so that only a few of the host survived.

Then was Tus almost bereft of reason; and it fell upon Gudarz to convey the heavy tidings unto Kai Khosroo. Now when the Shah heard the news of his slaughtered army, as well as of the death of Firoud his half-brother, his anger was hot against Tus, whom he rightly considered

the cause of all this evil. And he wrote unto Friburz, the grandson of Kai Kaoos, saying, "I warned Tus not to proceed through the land of Firoud and his mother, and he has disregarded my words and brought an untimely death upon them both. Moreover, he has led my troops to destruction. Do thou go, therefore, and take the command from him. Send him to me bound in cords, and see to it that thou be loyal to me, and that thou give ear in all things to the counsels of Gudarz the Wise."

So Friburz took over the command of the Persian host, and he quickly raised fresh troops, but Tus was sent in deep disgrace to the Persian Court. And when he fell to the earth before the face of his master, the Shah spoke bitter words, saying, "Were it not that thou art old, and of noble race, I would have thee put to death for all the evil thou hast wrought. But thou shalt no longer be free to work wickedness; into a dungeon shalt thou go, and there shalt thou abide."

Meantime Friburz sent a message unto Peran-Wisa reproaching him for the secret manner of his night-attack, and asking for a truce.

And Peran-Wisa agreed to this, pointing out, however, that as the Persians were invaders, it was lawful that he should attack them in what manner he could, so long as a truce was not declared, and advising them strongly to leave the country of Afrasiab while they yet might do so.

When the month's truce was ended the armies met in the shock of battle once again; and at first it went ill with the troops of Peran-Wisa who were contending with the army of Gew. Hoping for better fortune in another part of the field, the Tartar leader directed his forces against Friburz and his troops, and routed them so that they fled for shelter to the skirts of a mountain. When

Gew saw this reverse he sent a messenger to Friburz, bidding him join hands if he could, and, if not, to send him the royal banner of Persia in order that it should not fall into the hands of the enemy. But Friburz was obstinate, and he replied: "I cannot go to Gew for I am shut in by the enemy on every side; and I will not part with the banner of Persia; but do thou tell Gudarz to come to my aid." But the messenger, acting according to the words of Gew, spoken to him in secret, struck down the standard-bearer and seized the royal banner. He then conveyed it in safety to Gudarz, who displayed it to his troops. Encouraged by the sight, the Persians charged impetuously upon the enemy; but though many of the brave warriors fought to the death, the victory lay with the army of Peran-Wisa, and the few that survived of the Persian host fled back in terror to their land.

Now when Afrasiab heard the news of this victory he was filled with joy. He made a great feast for the warriors and officers of his army, and rained gold and silver pieces upon them; and to Peran-Wisa he gave rich gifts such as could not be counted for number and magnificence. But before he dismissed him to his own province he spoke words of warning, saying, "Have thine eye always turned upon the country of Persia, for the land that holds Rustem within its borders is to be always feared by us. Be watchful, therefore, and let not thine army sleep because the times seem good." And Peran-Wisa hearkened unto his words. In the meanwhile the land of Persia was filled with the groans of the defeated hosts. As for Kai Khosroo he would not even meet them face to face, but turned his back upon them, and, still calling down curses on the head of Tus, withdrew into a secret place and left the land to take care of itself.

Then were the nobles of Persia beside themselves with fear and anxiety: and when one said, "Let us seek the help and counsel of Rustem," they betook themselves to the Champion, and besought him that he would speak to the Shah and implore him to turn to them the light of his countenance again. And Rustem prevailed upon the Shah, and even induced him to release Tus from his dungeon. And when the Shah called upon Rustem to lead his forces, Tus came and threw himself at his feet and implored that this post might once again be entrusted to him, that so he might have opportunity to atone for the evil he had done. Then Rustem supported Tus saying, "He is well able to oppose the host of Peran-Wisa; but if Afrasiab himself takes the field then will I undertake the chief command." So the Shah agreed to the request of Tus, on condition that Gudarz stood at his right hand to advise and restrain him.

Now when Afrasiab heard that Tus and Gew were come forth to meet his army, he rejoiced, for he feared none but Rustem. And he sent out messengers and called to his aid the armies of the neighbouring states; and from all parts of the earth come forth troops to aid him. Amongst them came a famous champion, who slew, in single combat, many brave Persian warriors. Tus himself would have challenged him, but Gudarz would not permit him, and sent Gew in his stead. And in that combat both Gew and the hostile champion were very nearly slain; and each retired, sorely wounded, to his own camp. Then a general combat took place, in which, although greatly outnumbered, the Persians stood their ground, so that the issue was undecided.

Then Peran-Wisa sought to make an end of the matter by calling the demons to his aid; and he made terms

with a magician, who undertook to overwhelm and oppress the Persian host. The magician threw his cloak of wonder about his shoulders, and betook himself to the top of the mountain which overlooked the Persian camp. From this summit he sent down a thick cloud which blotted out the sun, and heavy showers of hail and snow, which whirled in the faces of the Persians, blinding and harassing them. The Tartar host were not involved in this storm, and they made a rush upon their foes in full daylight and serene weather. The Persians, baffled and discouraged, fell back in disorder, leaving the whole plain crimson with their blood. At this critical moment, as the leaders asked each other in dismay the cause of this sudden storm and darkness, the Spirit of Good appeared in their midst and pointed to the mountain. Forthwith one of their number hastened to the summit, where the magician stood working his magic spells. Giving him no opportunity of escape, the Persian cut off his arms; upon which a sudden whirlwind arose and swept away the darkness and the hailstones, so that the weather was once more fine and clear. This gave the Persians a fairer chance of victory; but in the battle which followed they could do nothing against the overwhelming numbers opposed to them, and the hearts of the soldiers failed, and they retreated to the mountains. There they found a fortress, in which they placed their sick and wounded; and meantime sent word of their distress to Kai Khosroo. The Shah was deeply moved by these sorrowful tidings; and sending for Rustem, he implored him to go to the army's aid. "All my life long have I fought the battles of Persia," said the Champion, "and it would seem that rest is never to be my portion. Yet at thy will, O Shah, I will arise and go forth." So he called together an army,

" In their midst is one like unto Rustem "

and set off to succour his countrymen ; and even as he started, the Persian host went out once more against their foes, and once again were defeated, so that they had no courage left.

Now, as they were huddled like frightened sheep upon the mountain side, there came one unto the camp who spoke of a host of men coming to their aid with a leader who rode in their midst, mighty as a forest-tree. A whisper of "Rustem" ran through the camp ; but Gudarz said : "Rejoice not too soon, nor believe every chance word which rumour may bring." Peran-Wisa also heard the tidings, and downcast and sad at heart was he ; for he knew that against great Rustem nothing could prevail. And then he visited Kamoos of Kushan, a famous hero who had come to his aid from afar ; and he described the wonderful strength and courage of the hero ; but Kamoos scoffed at his words, saying, "Are his great limbs made of iron that they should resist my blade ? And though he now holds his head high between his shoulders, it will not be there for long if I but meet him in the fight."

Encouraged by these bold words, the old man returned to his tent. That night, when the moon shone high above the mountain-top, a great cry arose from the watchers at the Persian outposts ; and one said to the other : "I see a cloud of dust, and a noise as of many horsemen fills the night with sound. And behold ! a great army draws nigh bearing torches, and in their midst is one like unto Rustem our Champion." Then a mighty shout went up from the tents of Persia, and courage returned to the hearts of the soldiers, and they shouted again for joy. When Peran-Wisa heard this sound through the stillness of the night his heart sank

within him; for he knew that Rustem was indeed come.

From that hour there was no repose for the leaders on either side. Preparations were made with feverish haste for the impending battle, and at midday the strife began.

First of all, as was the custom in those days, a series of single combats was fought; and in the beginning a Tartar champion overthrew his Persian opponent, and was proudly riding back to his host, when Rustem, taking his bow and a few arrows in his hand, sallied forth on foot, and intercepted him with the question: "Whither art thou bound, O friend?"

In much astonishment and wrath the Tartar warrior cried: "Who, then, art thou? And what kindred dost thou leave behind to lament thy coming fall?" To which Rustem replied: "Why seek to know that which can do thee no good? My name is death to thee, for thine hour is come."

"Is that so?" jeered the other. "Thou talkest bravely for one on foot amongst mounted warriors!"

"And hast thou never heard of men on foot who conquered horsemen? Learn that I have come to require thy horse of thee."

"And thou unarmed?" cried the Tartar chief.

"No!" thundered Rustem; "Behold my bow and arrows, and see with what effect they may be used!"

With these words he drew a careless bow, and straightway, the foeman's horse fell dead upon the ground.

Then the hero uttered his great laugh, while the Tartar, trembling with rage and fear, showered his arrows upon him without effect. Then Rustem chose a dart with care, and, placing it on the string, he drew the feathered arrow

to his ear ; and it seemed hardly to have left the bow ere the Tartar chief fell dead upon the earth. A moment great Rustem stood, erect and firm as a tower ; then he returned to his followers, while the Tartar host gazed with wonder upon him.

In the general battle that followed this encounter the advantage lay with the sons of Persia, and once more the heart of Peran-Wisa was sore troubled. But Kamoos still mocked at the name of Rustem, saying, " Were he as strong as a mad elephant, yet would I prevail and overcome him in the fight."

So next day, to make good his boast, he rode forth and called aloud for Rustem ; but a young warrior who had learnt the art of war from the champion himself implored that he might be allowed to take up the challenge ; and, rushing out in too great haste against the Tartar chieftain, he was slain. Then Rustem strode from his tent, his arms clanking, and uttered his war-cry in a voice that made the very earth tremble.

" Why this proud clamour ? " cried Kamoos. " Does not the lion roar when he sees his prey ? " answered Rustem ; " and does not the earth shake with terror at the sound ? "

With a rush and thunder of hoofs the champions crashed together, and as each drew back from the shock, Kamoos threw his rope noose with such skill that, although it missed the head of Rustem it fell over the neck of Rakush. Then was Rustem wroth, and he put his hand through the noose and pulled, and strained ; and on his side Kamoos pulled and strained ; until all at once the cord broke and Kamoos fell backward to the ground, and, with shout of " Rustem ! " the hero cast his own noose round the boaster's neck and dragged him before the army, saying, " What death shall this man die ? " Then with

one hand he cast him upon the spears of the nobles; and so he died.

Great terror fell then upon the Tartar host, and they would have retreated at once: but their ally the Khakan, wroth because of the death of Kamoos his friend, prevailed upon Peran-Wisa to send a message of defiance to Rustem. To this the hero calmly replied: "I seek not the death of the Khakan. And of all your host I desire only to look upon the face of Peran-Wisa."

Then another Tartar chieftain came out to Rustem, but not to fight with him; for he was sent by Peran to try to put an end to this terrible conflict.

"Why," asked this warrior, "dost thou show such bitter enmity against us? Is there no other way by which this vengeance may be satisfied? But tell me now, what is thy name?"

And Rustem would only answer: "Send to me Peran-Wisa, and I will tell him my name."

When word of this was brought to Peran-Wisa the old man was sorely discomfited; for he said, "Of a surety he will kill me." And he wept and said unto the nobles: "Now nothing awaits us but fire and sword; for this must certainly be Rustem the Mighty, come to ravage our land."

Then the Khakan strove to cheer him, saying, "Go thou and confer with him; and if he seeks for peace, do thou thankfully accept. But if he talks of war and vengeance, why, we will crush his hopes of victory. He is not made of iron or brass, nor does he, like the demon-race, ride upon the clouds or vanish in mid-air. He is not stronger than an elephant; yet shall he know what it is to fight with me. Moreover, remember that for every man in his army we can call upon three hundred. Go thou to him boldly, then, and fear not."

So Peran-Wisa set out, but his heart was faint and his knees shook under him as he approached the Champion's tent. Respectfully dismounting before the leader of his foes, "I am Peran-Wisa," he said, "leader of the hosts of Afrasiab. Tell me now, I pray thee, thy name."

"I," answered the hero, deep-voiced, "am Rustem, armed, as thou seest, for battle." Then, as the old man paid him the reverence due to his mighty prowess, he continued: "I bring unto thee, O Peran-Wisa, the blessing of Kai Khosroo and of Ferangis his mother, who see thee every night in their dreams."

At these words Peran-Wisa was greatly astonished, and hastened to reply: "Do they indeed bless me? My blessings I return upon that royal youth and on his noble mother who saved my life. But thou art come for vengeance upon us, and what have we to say to thee in this matter?" and Rustem answered:

"We come not to destroy the innocent, but those who are guilty of the blood of Saiawush. Give them, then, up to us, and we will leave thy land in peace."

But Peran-Wisa mourned, and said: "Alas! this cannot be, for Afrasiab will never agree to give up the murderers, seeing that they are his near relations. And now is my heart torn in two pieces; for my love is towards Kai Khosroo, and my loyalty towards Afrasiab his grandfather. Rather would I die than fight against Kai Khosroo, whom I nursed as a babe and watched over as a youth, and loved as though he were mine own dear son."

Rustem's heart was grieved for the old man; but he bade him decide quickly since he had no wish himself to end the conflict; and nothing less than the delivery of the murderers, together with rich gifts for the Shah and submissive messages from Afrasiab, would content him.

So Peran-Wisa went sadly away; for well he knew that the confederate chieftains would not agree to the terms of Rustem. As he expected, they would not listen for a moment, saying that there were still many champions ready for the conflict with the Persian hero, and that one attack after another must wear him out in time. So one by one the champions advanced against him with proud looks and high hearts; but none of them returned alive to the tents of their people. Then the rival forces strove in general battle, and the field was strewn with the limbs of warriors and crimsoned with the blood of the slain; and, for all their valorous deeds, the Tartars could not prevail against the might of Rustem and his host. At length the Persian hero sought the great Khakan chief who had boasted most loudly against him, and shouted to him in his great voice of thunder:

"Surrender unto me those elephants, that ivory throne, that crown and chain of gold; for they are fitter for the Shah of Persia than for thee. Thou wilt not? Then will I soon secure thee and lead thee prisoner to his foot-stool where thou mayst keep thy worthless life by giving up thy crown and throne."

The fury of the Khakan was roused by these words, and he bade his men shower arrows upon the daring foeman. Even Gudarz, well as he knew Rustem, was alarmed at sight of the shower of missiles which filled the air, and sent Gew hurrying to his aid. But Rustem spoke calmly, saying: "I fear my good horse Rakush grows weary of these many conflicts, and if needs must be, thou shalt see me attack the Khakan and his host on foot. Though they are countless as ants or locusts, thou shalt see them laid dead upon the ground, or brought as prisoners to Kai Khosroo"

With these words he dismissed Gew from his side, and pushing on towards the Khakan, he cried in his deep tones: "Thou hast not yet known Rustem, or thou wouldst never trouble to attack him thus. For he is a dragon that never dies, and the strongest in the fight is ever his prey. But this thou shalt quickly learn."

Then he urged on good Rakush, and laid about him right and left in such wise that the Khakan, who was watching all this from the back of his great white elephant, began to be sore afraid, and sent one of his warriors to parley with Rustem, saying: "Why is thy wrath so hot against us? We never injured Saiawush, nor even were we present at his fall. And now the magic spells of Afrasiab have brought us here to contend against great Rustem. Therefore, since peace is better than war and bloodshed, let us part in peace."

To which Rustem replied: "My answer shall be brief. Let your master give us his crown, his golden collar, his throne, and his elephants, and then shall he go in peace. He came for plunder, and till he gives up all to us he asks for peace in vain from Rustem."

When these words were told the Khakan, he broke into a rage so great that his words of fury came clearly to the ears of Rustem. And since his speech was full of insult and contempt, the Persian hero delayed no longer, but rode up quickly, and with a skilful cast of his noose dragged the Khakan from his great white elephant of war, from whence he sent him bound to the footstool of Kai Khosroo.

This crowned the disasters of that terrible day, and when Peran-Wisa saw it he ordered all his host to flee, and, riding himself to the Court of King Afrasiab, he entered in haste, saying, "Flee for thy life, for Rustem is at hand,

and no man can stand in his presence. He hath turned our land into a lake of blood, and lo! from thy hand cometh all this evil. For the iron wherewith thou didst slay the noble Saiawush hath entered even into the souls of us, thy people." But Afrasiab was full of wrath because of the disgrace that had fallen upon his host; and he hastened to prepare a new army, saying that not a single Persian should be left alive within his land.

Meantime, Rustem, having sent word of his success to Kai Khosroo, proceeded to follow it up by attacking the cities of the neighbouring provinces. And first he marched against Kafur, the monster king whose table each day was provided with the flesh of the fairest maidens in his land. Quickly was this evil man overpowered by Rustem, who gave his body unto the dogs, while he plundered his palace and razed it to the ground. Then next he advanced upon the province of Khoten, the land of Saiawush, and seized it in the name of Kai Khosroo. When Afrasiab heard this he became yet more angry and alarmed, and sent a spy into Rustem's camp that he might discover his intentions. And when the spy came back, he reported that Rustem was determined not to cease his course of destruction until he had met Afrasiab face to face. Then Afrasiab greatly fearing, sent again for Peran-Wisa and asked who could be found to match this dreadful champion in the field. And after much thought Peran-Wisa reminded him of a neighbouring prince named Pulad, whose size was so great and whose strength so immense that it seemed impossible that any man could withstand him. Then was Afrasiab much relieved and pleased: and he sent to Pulad, offering him many rich gifts if he would fight for him against the Champion. Now Pulad was indeed a mighty man of valour, and

it pleased him that he should be asked to fight for the Tartar king. So he prepared an army, and rode forth at its head to challenge the Persian nobles. First of all there went out Gew against him ; and he was promptly caught in the foeman's noose. Seeing this, Gew's two brothers rushed to his aid ; but, to their dismay, they also were secured in the same manner. They managed however, in their struggles, to free themselves by breaking the ropes, but not before Pulad had wounded them severely with his sword. When Gudarz their father saw their dire peril he cried unto Rustem for aid ; and he, the refuge to whom all men turned, at once strode out to their help. Promptly setting free the three warriors he turned his attention to their giant foe. A terrible conflict followed ; for both men were very skilful in the use of their weapons, and the two great clubs swayed backward and forward like forest trees in a gale of wind. At length the warrior Pulad struck his adversary so heavy a blow that the whole plain resounded, and Rustem fell back stunned. But ere Pulad could deal death with his sword the hero had recovered, and managed to ward off the furious stroke so that it fell harmlessly upon his armour. Then Pulad, discomfited, proposed a wrestling match, thinking that his strength would be superior at close quarters.

The troops at once withdrew on either side, so as to leave the champions with a clear space ; and Afrasiab, who was present at the conflict, sent a private message to Pulad, saying, " The moment thou hast Rustem underneath thee, plunge thy sword into his heart. Heed not the rules of conflict, but attend unto my word.'

But Pulad had little chance of following this advice ; for at the first onset Rustem snatched him in his arms

as though he were a child, and threw him with such force that he appeared like one dead. But the moment Rustem had turned from him, and, remounting Rakush, was preparing to ride away, the prince, who had only pretended to be dead, arose and fled like the wind to his followers. Upon this Rustem led a general assault upon the allied forces, with such success that Pulad continued his flight. Thus abandoned by their powerful ally, Peran-Wisa again approached Afrasiab and counselled him to leave the field, whereupon the old king hastened to hide himself in the secret places of the mountains, leaving his standards and horses, and elephants and treasure behind him.

But Rustem stayed only to divide this immense booty among his men and to burn down the palace of the enemy. This done, he returned to Kai Khosroo, and the Shah received him with much honour and rejoicing, and made a banquet for him which lasted for the waning of a moon. And after this Rustem returned to the home of Zal his father, carrying with him the praises of all men.

CHAPTER XVI

RUSTEM FIGHTS WITH DEMONS AND RESCUES BYZUN

IT came to pass one day, as Kai Khosroo sat in his rose-garden, his mind free from care, listening to sweet music and the converse of his warriors, that there came a stable-man in great trouble, who desired very earnestly to have speech with the Shah. And when he was come into the royal presence, he told how that a wild ass had come in from the neighbouring forest and had broken into the King's stables with the ferocity of a lion, injuring and killing many of the royal horses.

Then the courtiers exclaimed in amazement: "What sort of wild ass is this that can overcome the horses of war?" But Kai Khosroo pondered and said: "This is no ass, but a disguise of the Demon Akwan. Which of you now will go forth against him?"

The warriors looked at one another in dismay; for all knew Akwan to be the most powerful of Demons; and they said unto the Shah: "None but Rustem the Champion can undertake this task." So a swift message was sent to Rustem, who once more mounted Rakush, that good steed, and left his peaceful home to fight for his Shah. Four days he searched in vain for the mysterious creature, but at length he found him in the depths of a forest,

making his way with wild leaps and bounds towards the royal abode. Then Rustem unwound the snare he carried and threw the noose, as he thought, well over the animal's head; but lo! when he pulled, it held nothing but air, and the ass had vanished. "This of a truth is the Demon Akwan," said Rustem, "and against him my noose is of no avail."

Not long afterwards he found the ass again in another part of the forest, and struck at it with his sword; but the sword passed harmlessly through the empty air, for again the beast had vanished. Next he tried spear and arrow; but all in vain, the demon appeared and disappeared just as he chose; and for three whole days and nights the Champion fought, as it were, with a shadow. At the end of that time Rustem was worn out for want of sleep and with weariness; so he dismounted, and, setting Rakush free to graze on a stretch of fresh grass near a rivulet, he lay down under a tree and fell fast asleep. Now when Akwan the demon saw this, he knew that his chance was come. So he hastened towards him in his own form, quickly dug up the earth on every side of him, and, snatching up the plot of ground with Rustem upon it, placed it upon his head and flew away with it. The motion aroused the hero, who felt some alarm at his unusual situation, for the power of demons is greater than that of men; but before he could decide how to act the demon thus addressed him: "O warrior, thou art now completely in my power. Tell me, then, what death thou dost prefer? Shall I plunge thee into the sea or drop thee down upon the mountain-top?"

Now Rustem guessed at once that if he expressed a wish the demon would do precisely the opposite, so he thought a little and said: "I pray thee throw me on the moun-

tain : for though I shall be devoured by lions and tigers, yet will my bones remain to show what once I was ; but if I am thrown into the sea I shall vanish away and no man shall know my resting-place." Then Akwan said : "I desire that no trace of thee, not even a bone, shall be left." So he raised him up in his hands and flung him headlong into the ocean at a spot where he hoped that crocodiles would devour him. Scarcely, indeed, had Rustem risen to the surface when one of these monsters came at him with wide-open jaws ; but the hero promptly drew his sword and cut off its head. Others followed ; but the hero, swimming with one hand, kept his sword-arm free, and was able easily to kill all that came against him. At length after breasting the wave many hours, he reached the shore, and at once hastened to the spot where he had left his steed. But to his dismay and wrath no sign of Rakush was to be seen. Up and down the forest he hunted in vain, until at length he came to the outskirts, where a large troop of the horses of Afrasiab, guarded by keepers, were feeding. Now these keepers had ensnared good Rakush ; but the horse would neither eat nor drink with the rest, and was ever watching for his master. And when the tall form of Rustem appeared through the trees, and his deep voice was heard calling, Rakush gave a great neigh, and, knocking down five keepers broke down the wall of the enclosure, and galloped to meet his master. Then Rustem shouted for joy, and, leaping upon his charger's back, he slew the keepers who opposed him and caused the rest to flee, and then he drove off the whole herd of horses as a gift to Kai Khosroo.

Now just at that time Afrasiab himself came down to look upon his horses ; for he thought very highly of the steeds. And when he heard that they had been driven

off by a stranger he was filled with fury, and followed after them with his troops. But, when he saw Rustem riding in their midst he was sore afraid, for he thought his hiding-place had been discovered, and that Rustem was come forth against him. So he turned and fled, leaving behind him not only the horses, but four elephants of war also. Then Rustem returned to the riverside, where first he had met the demon, Akwan and there the monster lay in waiting, for he thought that the hero would be worn out with the fight with Afrasiab and with his long hunt for Rakush; and when he saw him approaching he called unto him:

"What! dost thou think because thou hast once escaped me that thou, a thing of flesh and blood, can prevail with demons? Come hither, that I may send thee unto eternal night."

But Rustem, as he spoke, threw his noose with such skill that it entangled the limbs and head of the demon, and this time it held fast. Before Akwan could free himself, the hero dealt such a mighty stroke with his sword that the monster's head rolled from his body. Then Rustem took the grisly head by the hair and laid it at the feet of Kai Khosroo. And the Shah's mouth was full of his praise, and he prayed him to remain as his guest for ever. But Rustem reminded the Shah that he had yet to raise an army powerful enough to avenge the death of Saiawush his father; and to this end he craved permission to return to his own land.

Peace, it seemed, had come to dwell in the land of Persia, for the head of Afrasiab had been brought very low. But calamity is never far away from the dwellers on this earth; and so it came to pass that one day, as the Shah sat with his warriors at a banquet, making merry over the wine-cups, a band of the people of the land of

Arman came to him with a sad complaint. They were husbandmen, depending on the crops of their fields and the fruit of their orchards ; and season after season their land was overrun by herds of wild boars, which destroyed their produce utterly and caused them to go in fear of their lives. And when the Shah enquired from whence these creatures came they answered ; " They come from the land of Afrasiab, O Shah, and none of us dare go out against them, for they are very strong and fierce. Wherefore we come to implore thee, O Shah, to send us a warrior who will rid the land of this plague."

Then Kai Khosroo turned to his nobles and warriors and asked who would undertake this adventure ; but they were weary of fighting, and cared not to attack wild beasts, which, said they, were worse even than demons ; and so they returned no answer.

Then there came into the presence of the Shah a young man, tall and graceful of form, whose name was Byzun ; and he was the son of Gew. When he heard the cry of the men of Arman he threw himself at the feet of the Shah and besought him that he might be sent to perform this deed of valour. And the Shah was pleased, and promised him a rich gift of precious stones, and a horse adorned with a golden girdle, if he would do this thing. But Gew, his father, was deeply grieved, and said unto the king : " He is too young and tender, O Shah, for never yet has he been tried ; and my mind misgives me that he will not return in safety." But Byzun persisted, saying, "Though I am young in years, I am old in wisdom, and, therefore I pray thee let me go forth."

And the Shah said : " Go forth ; but take with thee Girgin for thy counsellor, and he shall restrain thy youth with words of wisdom."

So the two set forth to the land of Arman, and after a long journey reached the forest in which the wild boars ranged. There they made a fire and sat down to rest and eat; and after that Girgin made as though to lie down and sleep; but Byzun said: "Come, let us go forth against these monsters."

Then Girgin yawned as though with sleep, saying, "Go forth if thou wilt, for it is thou, not I, who undertook this adventure. For my part, I shall be content to look on."

So Byzun, marvelling at such words, left him, and betook himself to the forest, knowing not that the heart of Girgin was full of jealousy and hatred towards him because of the favour and kindness shown him by the Shah.

Once within the forest, Byzun had little difficulty in finding the lair of the wild beasts. Some of them he destroyed as they slept; but the noise awoke the others, who sprang fiercely upon the intruder with open mouths and gleaming tusks. But the youth fought so bravely that, after a long fight, not a boar remained alive. Then he took their great tusks and hung them round his saddle-bow, and, having burnt out their lair, he returned in triumph to Girgin. Now when Girgin saw him his heart was filled with fresh bitterness; but he asked with smiling lips: "What wilt thou do with the glistening tusks, O Byzun?"

"I will send them unto Kai Khosroo," replied the lad in his joy, "he will give me high honours for such a gift as this."

Then Girgin praised and flattered him, and bade him lie down to rest, all the while plotting to bring ruin upon him to prevent his triumphant return to the Shah.

When morning came, and Byzun arose, refreshed with sleep, Girgin spoke fair words to him, and said: "'Tis a pity to leave this land till we have seen what it contains.

It is well known to me, for I have often stayed here with Rustem in bygone days. For we are close upon the borders of the land of Afrasiab, and near by there is a garden palace where live all the fairest of his maidens. Among them is Manijeh, the lovely daughter of the king, who keeps a perpetual spring-time in this garden of delight. Would'st thou look upon this wondrous garden and all that it contains ? "

To this proposal Byzun readily agreed, and Girgin forthwith conducted him to a place from which he could not only see, but be seen, by the princess Manijeh in her garden tent. And it came to pass that when the beautiful maiden looked upon the handsome youth she fell deeply in love with him. So she sent her nurse to him where he stood outside the gate, with the message : " The princess hath looked on thee, and amongst all the beauties of her garden there is none she likes so well to rest her eyes upon. Tell her, then, thy name."

Meantime young Byzun had fallen deeply in love with Manijeh in his turn ; and when the woman came to him with her message he replied : " I am Byzun, the son of Gew the warrior, and from Persia am I come to free the land of Arman from a plague. Hundreds of wild boars have I killed in this adventure, and I was about to return to my father's house to claim honour from Kai Khosroo for my deed. But now since I set eyes upon thee all else in the world has passed from my mind."

Then he begged the nurse for a meeting, and when this was arranged he gave no further thought to Girgin, but hastened to the tent of the princess. There he was received with every sign of affection and honour ; wine and rich food were set before him ; musicians played their sweetest airs, and each moment the youth and the

maiden loved each other more dearly. But at length Byzun remembered his father and his home, and he entreated Manijeh to come with him to Persia and be his wife. She, however, knowing how difficult it would be for her to escape, returned no answer, and, fearing to lose her lover, she gave him that night a potion which made him fall into a deep sleep, in the midst of which she had him carried in secret to the palace of Afrasiab, which he had now rebuilt, where she concealed him in her own apartments, and soon after they were wedded. Now after many days, the guards of the house of Afrasiab discovered that a Persian youth was in hiding in the apartments of the princess; and they came and told Afrasiab. The king was beside himself with fury when he heard the news, and he swore to cast out his daughter and to put Byzun to a disgraceful death. He forthwith sent for Gersiwaz his brother, the same who had brought about the destruction of Saiawush, and ordered him to go to the house of the women and to take Byzun, and put him to death. Thereupon Gersiwaz came to the rooms of Manijeh, and, surrounding them with troops, he broke in and found Byzun sitting at the banquet by the side of his wife, with his face full of joy and laughter. Then Gersiwaz threatened him, saying, "Now art thou fallen into the hands of the king, and thy life shall come to an end this very day."

But Byzun drew his dagger and made as though he would offer a desperate resistance; and, regarding Gersiwaz haughtily, he told him his name and family, and offered to fight any man who should oppose him. So Gersiwaz used soft words, and persuaded him to come before king Afrasiab, there to give an account of himself.

Now Byzun feared to bring blame upon the head of the

A Royal Hunt

princess his wife, so when he was asked how he came into the palace he replied: "I came from Persia, mine own country, to hunt for boars in the forest; and having put an end to that plague I lay down, weary with toil, to rest in a pathless wilderness. But as I slept a fairy came, and, lifting me from the ground, conveyed me to a summer-tent where dwelt a beautiful princess. From thence I was conveyed, still slumbering, to this palace, where I became the husband of the princess. But during all the time my heart yearned for mine own country. Often have I shed tears as I sat thinking sadly of the fair land of Persia. But it was not possible for us to escape, seeing that we were held by sorcery and magic; hence came it that neither Manijeh nor myself have merited blame at your hands, seeing that we have acted not by our own will and choice."

Afrasiab, however, scoffed at this account of the matter, and reviled him with accusations of falsehood and cowardice. At this last charge Byzun was roused to fury, saying, "Am I indeed a coward who have braved the boar's tusk and the lion's claw? Try me now with horse and battle-axe against a thousand of your Tartars—not one of them shall live to tell the tale. If thou wilt not do this, then do thy worst and take my life how thou wilt—but remember that my blood will be avenged. Thou knowest the power of Rustem!"

Now the name of Rustem, and the remembrance of all the evil he had wrought in his land, did but inflame the fury of Afrasiab, and he commanded forthwith that Byzun should be bound and led forth to die upon the gallows. And while they prepared to hang him, he cried unto the passing wind and bade it bear the message of disgrace and death unto the Court of the Persian

Shah ; and he called also for vengeance upon the land of Afrasiab.

Now as he stood there in his distress, the good old Peran-Wisa happened to pass by, and, seeing the handsome youth in this sad state he asked for what crime he was to be executed. Gersiwaz scoffingly replied that it was but a Persian robber, son of Gew, and related to Rustem. But the old man was filled with pity and regret, and, alighting from his horse, he approached the youth and questioned him, saying, "Why didst thou leave thy country and choose a path that has brought thee to this untimely grave?" So Byzun told him his story, dwelling especially upon the treachery of Girgin, which had brought him to this misfortune. Then Peran-Wisa gave orders that the execution should be stayed until he had spoken to the king ; and he went in and stood before Afrasiab. And the king said : "Why are thine eyes downcast and thy countenance full of gloom? I know thy wisdom and all thou hast done for me and my land. Tell me thy desire that I may grant it." Then Peran-Wisa said, "I came to ask that thou spare the life of the youth Byzun, thy son-in-law. For if not, the misery which sprang from the blood of Saiawush will again overtake us, and the land will once more be plunged in desolation. Remember how I warned thee on the former occasion, and call to mind all that has since come to pass. If thou kill this boy, the swords which now sleep in their scabbards will flash forth again and thy land will be utterly destroyed."

Then Afrasiab's purpose was shaken ; but he said : "He hath brought disgrace upon me by marrying my daughter in this fashion. Therefore he must die." "Not so," replied Peran-Wisa. "Let him be imprisoned in a

deep cavern where he will never more be heard of. Thou canst not then be accused of shedding his blood, and Persia will not know what has become of him." So Afrasiab listened to the words of his counsellor, and he gave orders that Byzun should be chained hand and foot and thrown into a deep dungeon, into which neither sun nor moon could shine; and he commanded that his daughter Manijeh should share the same fate. Moreover, he ordered that a mighty stone, torn from the bottom of the ocean by the Demon Akwan, should be laid upon the mouth of the pit so that there could be no escape. And Gersiwaz did this to Byzun as Afrasiab had commanded; but when he prepared to take Manijeh also, there arose among the people such a mighty lamentation that he was content to strip her of her rich garments and costly jewels, and to cast her forth, bare headed and bare-footed, into the desert in which the dungeon lay; and, wandering to that dread demon-stone, she sat there, bowed to the earth with woe.

Now as she sat and wept the voice of Byzun lamenting reached her ears; and on looking closer she found a little hole in the rock into which she could put her hand, and this extended right down to the place where her husband lay. Then Manijeh rejoiced, and daily went to the city to beg for food, which she dropped through the fissure to the unhappy prisoner below. None knew her for the daughter of Afrasiab, but all men pitied her and gave her what she asked; and so was Byzun fed and comforted in that deep, dark place of torment.

Meantime the traitor Girgin, finding that Byzun did not return, began to be alarmed for the consequences of his treachery, and he pondered as to how he should account for his absence at the Persian Court. He looked for him in

all directions, but every trace had vanished, save that he found his horse wandering about with bridle loose. Leading the animal, he returned to the city of Kai Khosroo, which he entered with every appearance of great grief, and, while Gew was hastily summoned, began to tell how that he had helped Byzun to put an end to the wild boars whose teeth still hung upon the young man's saddle-bow. When Gew arrived his heart was filled with grief for that Girgin had returned alone. He caressed and fondled his son's horse and then, when his emotion would allow him to question Girgin, he implored him to tell all he knew of Byzun's fate. Then Girgin hesitated, and, fearing to tell the truth, said : " Of a surety I know not what has befallen him. For after we had destroyed the boars' lair and burnt down the trees of that part of the forest we were proceeding on our way, when a beautiful elk, with hoofs of steel and the head and tail of a horse bounded out of the forest towards us. Byzun at once threw his noose over the creature's head ; whereupon it grew very furious, and bounded away, dragging thy son with it. Then smoke seemed to arise from the ground and the earth looked like the sea, and in the midst of the confusion Byzun and the elk disappeared. Everywhere I looked for my dear companion, but I found him not ; and so I fear very greatly that he has been carried off by a White Demon."

But as he spake these words his heart failed him and his tongue stammered ; for he saw that the Shah, who was listening closely to the tale, did not believe him. Then Kai Khosroo asked many questions ; and in his confusion he forgot what he had said, and told a somewhat different story. Then Gew's rage was kindled, and seizing Girgin by the beard, he beat him severely, and would have killed him, had not Kai Khosroo commanded that he

should be put in chains until the truth should be known of the fate of the unhappy Byzun.

Meantime Gew was disconsolate; but he determined to leave no stone unturned to find his son. Swift horsemen were sent forth to every quarter of the earth; and when they returned without tidings he asked help of Kai Khosroo saying, "My mind misgives me that my son no longer lives!"

Then the Shah went to a secret place, and, taking from off his head his golden crown, he prayed to the Almighty to show him the spot where Byzun lay. Then he took in his hand the globe of crystal used by the Wise Men in all lands, and gazed intently. But though he examined all the seven zones of the earth in the divisions of the globe, yet could he see nothing of Byzun. Then he prayed again, and, looking once more upon the crystal, he searched the innermost recesses of the globe, where lay the under parts of the earth; and there he saw Byzun lying, a prisoner, in the deep, dark dungeon, while above sat a beautiful damsel weeping. Then Kai Khosroo called unto Gew, and said: "Weep no more, bold warrior, for thou shalt soon behold thy son." Then he showed him within the crystal the dismal cave, in which Byzun was sadly sitting, and the great demon-stone above, where sat Manijeh in her loneliness; and again he said: "Let thy heart be cheered; for though thy son be fast bound in fetters he shall soon be restored to liberty."

Then Gew, with the Shah's permission, sped away to the province of Zal to implore great Rustem to roll away the demon-stone and to liberate his son. Now Rustem was out a-hunting when he arrived, and Zal, while entertaining his guest, spoke of the Champion's wish to spend the rest of the days of Kai Khosroo in peace within his

own borders; so that Gew was beside himself with anxiety and impatience. But when the hero entered, weary with the chase, and had heard the anxious father's tidings, he wept with compassion, saying, "Fear not, for Rakush shall not lose the saddle from his shoulders until the chains of Byzun have been broken and he hath been restored to thy arms." Then he hastened to the Court of the Shah, and said: "Behold, O King, I am ready to do thy will, for I am fated to weary myself in thy service, and combat is for ever my lot."

When Girgin heard in his prison that Rustem was come, he sent greetings to him and implored him to intercede with the Shah that he might accompany the expedition and so atone for some of the mischief he had done; and, after consideration, the Shah was merciful, and gave ear to his petition. And when Rustem was asked what forces he would require to go against Afrasiab and his host the champion answered the Shah: "I take no army with me, though thou mayst place one upon the borders of thy land in readiness for what may befall." Instead of an army he chose seven valiant men, and taking quantities of jewels, rich brocades, stuffs, and carpets, and dressing himself and his companions as merchants, he set out with a thousand warriors, disguised as camel drivers, for the land of Afrasiab. His way brought him first to the province where dwelt the old man Peran-Wisa; and all the people flocked to see the great caravan and to buy his merchandise. Then Rustem brought gifts to Peran-Wisa, and besought him for leave to stay there awhile to sell his goods; and Peran-Wisa permitted this. So he took a house within the city and showed the people his merchandise; and the news of the great Persian caravan spread far and wide, so that many who dwelt outside the

city came in to see it. And ere long the tidings reached the ears of Manijeh when she came to the outskirts to beg for food ; and, hearing that the merchants were Persians, she hastened to the house of Rustem and said : " Doth the great king of Persia know that one of his warriors, Byzun by name, lies perishing in chains within an underground dungeon ? And what says Gew his father to this thing ? Good merchant, I pray thee to return to thine own land and bring the sad tidings of Byzun to Kai Khosroo and to Rustem the mighty, that they may come and save him."

But Rustem knew not who she was, and answered angrily :

" What should I, a humble merchant, know of these things ? I have no acquaintance with kings or warriors."

When Manijeh heard these harsh words she was overcome with grief, and began to weep bitterly, saying, " Do the men of Persia refuse assistance to the poor ? " Then Rustem looked kindly on her, and said : " I do not bear the tidings of the Court, for I am not an inhabitant of the royal city ; but tell me now thy grief, and I will help thee."

And Rustem prevailed upon her with words of comfort. Then Manijeh said : " My grief, O merchant, is that I am the daughter of Afrasiab, and the wife of Byzun, the Persian warrior who lieth in a deep, dark dungeon without hope of rescue. And this is the reason that the face thou seest, once beautiful as a rose, is now withered and haggard." Rustem was at once roused by this news, and enquired eagerly whether she had been able to feed the prisoner. She replied that she had been able to pass bread and water through a hole in the stone. Then Rustem gave unto her hands a roasted fowl, in the body of which he placed his own signet-ring, and bade her take it to her husband. She hurried away and did as he bade

her ; and when Byzun had opened the fowl and felt the ring and saw that the name of Rustem was engraved upon it, his heart leapt within him and he inquired eagerly whence she had obtained the food.

" From a merchant of Persia," she answered, " who questioned me closely concerning thee."

Then Byzun gave such a shout of joy that the walls of the cavern rang again ; and Manijeh, fearing lest his misery had sent him mad, looked down and cried, " O thou unhappy one, why dost thou laugh aloud, seeing that thou liest in a deep, dark dungeon ? "

And Byzun said : " Hope hath taken root in my heart."

" Wherefore ? " she asked.

" I dare not tell thee—no woman can keep a secret."

Then was Manijeh grieved to the heart, and said : " What ! Could I be faithless to thee—I who have sacrificed everything for thy love ? " " That is true," replied Byzun ; " then let me tell thee that yon chief of the caravan is Rustem himself, come to release me from this pit. Go thou to him and say, ' O thou Champion of Persia, tell me, art thou the master of Rakush ? ' "

So Manijeh returned in haste and spake the words which Byzun had told her ; and Rustem said : " Go back to thy husband and say, ' Truly I am the master of Rakush, come to deliver thee.' " Then they arranged that Rustem should make the attempt the very next night : and Manijeh was to light a great bonfire to guide him and his men to the spot where Byzun lay. Far and wide she sped all that day, collecting wood in the desert land, and when night came she lighted her fire and guided Rustem and his seven warriors to the spot. Then each brave warrior did his best to move away the stone, but all in vain. Now while they strove, there came to that

spot a host of demons of horrid aspect. They had the heads of dogs and feet and hair of goats ; and long nails were on their hands. Chief of them was the son of Akwan, whom Rustem had already killed. He was of immense height ; his face was black as coal, his mouth yawned like a cavern, his eyes were the colour of blood and the hair on his body stood out like needles. Burning to avenge upon Rustem the death of his father, this horrible monster tore up a tree by the roots and challenged him to fight. Rustem promptly attacked him, and a terrible struggle ensued. Several times the demon escaped the Champion's sword by vanishing into the air, but Rustem at last, by a lucky stroke, cut the body of the demon into two, and he then returned calmly to the work in hand.

First he prayed that the demon spells should be broken and that strength should be given him to move the mighty mass. Then, while his followers looked on with breathless interest, he exerted his fullest might, and lo ! the ponderous stone moved from its base and fell with the noise of a great explosion, so that the plain trembled under the shock. Then he let down his cord into the pit and drew up poor Byzun, whose flesh was withered so that his bones almost broke through his skin. Then Rustem embraced him, and, covering him with his cloak, he put him with Manijeh upon Rakush, and took them to his own house in the city. And after he had given them refreshment and clothing he would have sent them forthwith to Persia ; but Byzun implored that he might join in the coming fight, though he willingly agreed that Manijeh should be sent in safety to the city of the Shah. His plea prevailed, and that night did Rustem with Byzun and his seven warriors, go forth to the palace of Afrasiab ; and when they had come thither, Rustem

lifted the doors off their hinges and slew the watchman that kept them.

Then he lifted up his mighty voice and cried to the king; "O foolish man, sleep on as thou didst sleep while Byzun lay deep in thy dungeon! Thou hast forgotten that a road leads from Persia to thy land and that the hand of Rustem is ever strong to avenge; yea, here am I, Rustem, the son of Zal, come to destroy thee; and Byzun also has broken his chains, and is here to do thee service for thy cruelty."

The mighty voice spoke death to Afrasiab, and his heart fainted within him. In vain he called upon his guards to come to his help—there was no man to answer him. Then he crept to the door of his chamber, and fled trembling into the darkness; and because it was dark he escaped. But Rustem seized all that was in his house, his slaves and horses and jewels, and sent them to the city of Kai Khosroo.

By next morning, Afrasiab had collected a hundred thousand of his troops, and he marched out against Rustem who had summoned to his aid a thousand of his followers. First Rustem invited the champions to meet him singly; but none would accept the challenge of the Persian, so that at length great Rustem threw taunts at Afrasiab, saying, "Art thou, with thy thousands, afraid to face me with my one thousand? Art thou grown timid in thine old age?" This roused the king, and the two armies thereupon met in a great fight, in which Rustem performed deeds of wonderful valour, and by his prowess struck such terror into the hearts of the enemy that the banner of Persia prevailed and Afrasiab fled before his foe. Then Rustem returned in triumph to his own land, where Kai Khosroo came forth to meet him in state. "O man of valour," said he, "without whom my

soul had lost her stay, truly Zal is happy in such a son. For wherever men look they behold the mighty deeds that thou hast done."

Gew also received him with delight, and he blessed him for bringing back his beloved son; then followed a great feast, and the Shah would have kept him eating and drinking for many days, but that Rustem desired to return to Zal his father. As for the faithful Manijeh, Kai Khosroo honoured her with rich gifts, so that she and her husband forgot their past misfortunes and were happy for the rest of their lives.

CHAPTER XVII

BARZU THE BOASTFUL

NOW after this last defeat of the Tartar nost by a handful of Persian soldiers, it may easily be believed that Afrasiab had well-nigh lost heart; yet still he hoped that one day the power of Rustem might be broken.

And it came to pass on a time that as he was travelling for safety to a distant region of the Empire, he met on his road a huge man, broader and longer than ever he had seen, so that all other men looked like pigmies beside him. Much struck by the appearance of this gigantic being, Afrasiab stopped him and asked who he was.

"I am a native of yonder village," answered the man in a great strong voice.

"And who is thy father?"

"I know not, O stranger. My mother brought me here when I was a babe but she has never spoken of my father, and my birth is wrapped in mystery. Can I do aught to serve thee, for thou art an old man, and in thy appearance art full of distress?" Then Afrasiab said: "My misfortune is indeed great, for I have a bitter enemy whom no man can conquer; and since I have known him my peace of mind has fled. But if he were once subdued then should I not only be master of my own country,

but should rule all Persia besides. Now when I look upon thy great limbs and gigantic stature methinks thou alone art the man who can conquer this mine enemy."

"What!" cried Barzu, for that was the stranger's name, "is all this distress and affliction caused by one man, by one man only?"

"That is so," answered the king; "but this one man is Rustem and he is equal to a hundred. Neither sword nor mace nor spear can afflict him on the field of battle. To fight against him is like attacking a mountain of steel."

"Pooh!" cried the giant. "A mountain of steel indeed! I can reduce to powder a hundred mountains of steel! What is a mountain of steel to me?"

This boastful confidence delighted Afrasiab, who was accustomed to see men shrink into nothing at the very sound of Rustem's name; and he promptly disclosed the whole story, saying that he was the king of that land, and would give to Barzu the hand of his daughter and two of his finest provinces if he should succeed in destroying Rustem. Barzu was much too full of his own importance to be awed by the presence of the king, and he spoke openly to him saying, "What a coward slave art thou to be so dependent upon the help of a stranger! And of what stuff are the hearts of thy soldiers made! To think that thou, the prince of such a host, should be discomfited by the valour of one man! Truly it is not right that thou shouldst wear a royal crown when thou hast so disgraced thy kingly throne."

At one time such plain-speaking would have promptly roused the king to fury; but now he bore it with meekness, and, when Barzu had ended, began to implore him once more to take up arms against his foe. And the giant

agreed to this, saying that he would quickly subdue Rustem and place the whole kingdom of Persia under the dominion of the Tartar king. In many boastful words he described how this should be done, and how he would drive Kai Khosroo from his throne.

Then Afrasiab was filled with joy and hope, and poured gifts upon the stranger—horses, elephants, gold and jewels—so that he returned to his humble home as though he were some great prince.

Now when his mother saw and heard these things she began to weep and lament, saying thus to her son: "O Barzu, always too ready to boast of thy strength, these rich presents will be thy winding-sheet, and will draw thee to a terrible death. To think that thou of all men shouldst try thy strength against great Rustem! It must not be. Remember that he has destroyed even demons, and has overthrown Afrasiab's best warriors with his arm alone. Canst thou equal *him?* Go, return these rich gifts, which have turned thy poor foolish brain, and cast not thy dear life away in this fashion."

But Barzu was far too vain and confident of his own strength to heed her words, and he said: "Is not my strength greater than that of any man on earth? How then can Rustem prevail against me? Besides, if I declined the contest now, I should rightly win the name of coward, and that no true man should bear."

But his mother ceased not to persuade him, telling him that, young as he was, and ignorant of the science of warfare, he would stand no chance against the skill of his opponent. And Barzu repeated her words to Afrasiab, and the king ordered two of the most celebrated instructors in the art of fighting to train him in the use of sword and

bow and in throwing the noose ; so that after a few days he could overthrow eighteen trained warriors at one time. Then he came before the king and suggested that he should fight with eighteen of the strongest and most experienced teachers in the army, and bring them bound unto him ; but when they heard this proposal these men declared with one consent that Barzu was invincible, and that there was no need to test him further.

Then Afrasiab was much delighted, and gave to Barzu fresh presents of the richest kind as tokens of his good-will. The young giant himself was full of vanity and self-confidence, and most anxious to meet his foe, saying, " Let us advance without delay and meet this Rustem and this Kai Khosroo, that you may see me lop off their heads and present them unto Afrasiab, who shall henceforth rule over the Persian land.

Then was a great army gathered and speedily marched out under the new-made warrior's command, while Afrasiab followed with another host unto the borders of Persia. Now when Kai Khosroo heard of this great force marching confidently upon his land he was filled with astonishment, for but a little while since, Afrasiab had fled into captivity, his army scattered. He was not in the least alarmed, however, and merely ordered Tus and Friburz to oppose a large army to the advancing forces, while he followed them with another. The first army encountered that of Barzu before they were quite prepared and a terrific encounter followed, in which the host of Persia was utterly discomfited by the might of the young giant. When night fell, the Persian warriors fled from the field, unheeding the commands of Tus and Friburz, who, disdaining to flee, were left alone upon the

field, where they were seized by the conqueror and taken, bound in chains, to his tent.

At the news of the issue of this battle Afrasiab was beside himself with delight; but Kai Khosroo could scarcely believe it, and full of grief and consternation, he sent at once for Rustem.

Rustem, when he heard the tidings, was stirred with indignation and wrath, and without waiting to collect an army he set off with one companion for the scene of the battle, hoping to come upon the tent of Barzu and learn what manner of man it was who had brought this mishap upon the Persian host.

Now it was very dark, and as they stumbled about among the tents the two men came upon one that by its size and grandeur appeared to be that of which they were in search. Rustem peered through an opening in its side, and saw within a throne, upon which sat Afrasiab himself, with Barzu and Peran-Wisa attending him, while before them, covered with chains, stood Friburz and Tus. And as he listened, he heard these words from the mouth of the king: "To-morrow will I put thee to death even as I slew Saiawush." Then Rustem said to his companion; "Verily this is the pavilion of Afrasiab himself. Mark well, I pray thee, the place to which these prisoners are taken."

So they crept noiselessly between the tents, and saw that the two captive warriors were led to a tent near by, and closely guarded. Waiting until the watcher had settled down to rest, thinking his captives safe in the midst of the crowded camp, they fell upon him silently and put him to death. Then, entering the tent, they carried off the prisoners to a spot outside the camp, where they struck off their chains and took them back, rejoicing in their release, to Kai Khosroo.

The next morning, when Afrasiab arose and stood in the door of his tent, with Peran-Wisa by his side, he perceived that something was amiss ; for his warriors stood apart in groups and talked eagerly one to another. So he asked what had happened, and was told by a trembling courtier that a champion of Persia had visited the camp in the night and had killed the watchman and carried off the prisoners. "This is the work of no other than Rustem," cried Peran-Wisa ; and at that hated name Afrasiab was beside himself with disappointed rage. "Hasten!" he cried to Barzu, "Why delayest thou? Lead out thine army at once, attack the Persian, and challenge this Rustem to single combat."

When the challenge arrived, Rustem promptly mounted Rakush and rode out to meet his adversary ; but he intended that Barzu should not know that it was really the Persian Champion with whom he fought. So looking upon him he said :

"Young man, thou callest for Rustem. Behold! I am come instead of him to lay thee prostrate on the earth!"

"Wilt thou indeed?" cried Barzu. "I am the younger, it is true, and thou art old and experienced. But if thou art fire, know that I am water and that I can quickly quench thy flames."

With this he snatched up his bow and shot an arrow swiftly at Rustem ; and so the fight began.

When the foemen had emptied their quivers without effect, they took to their maces, but these were quickly bent as crooked as their bows. Then they gripped each other in fierce embrace, and here Barzu's immense strength showed to advantage even against the skill of Rustem. He could, however, obtain no decided advantage, until, just as both were becoming exhausted, he

snatched up his mace again and struck Rustem such a fearful blow that the Champion felt as if Mount Elburz had fallen upon him. One arm was so badly hurt that he could not use it, but he would not let his adversary know, and only gave his great laugh as they fell apart after the staggering shock of the encounter. Then Barzu could not withhold his admiration, saying, "Thou art indeed a wonderful warrior, for nothing seems to hurt thee. Had I struck such a blow upon a mountain of steel, it would have been crushed to powder, and yet thou seemst none the worse. Heaven forbid that such a blow should fall upon my head, for that indeed would be the end of me."

Then Rustem, who was divided between good-will for his opponent's frankness and courage, and anger that his own strength should be so nearly matched, suggested that the combat should be resumed upon the following day; and to this Barzu, wearied with the conflict, readily agreed. He hastened away to Afrasiab and told him that, though his strength and skill had not failed for an instant, they seemed to make no impression upon his adversary, since both he and his horse seemed to be made of flint. "Do not expect a certain victory," he concluded, "for Heaven only knows what will be the result of to-morrow's conflict."

Rustem meantime had betaken himself to Kai Khosroo, and, showing to him his arm, torn and useless as it was, said: "What is to be done? To-day I have escaped him, and he knows not even that he has wounded me. But I cannot stand against him to-morrow with one arm. Who is there who can take my place? If only Feramurz, my nephew, were here, he would gladly fight in my stead; but he, alas! is far distant. Let messengers, however,

be sent to him, and let us, on some pretence, delay the encounter till he arrives." To this the Shah, full of grief and dismay, was forced to agree. He proposed, however, that he himself should meet Barzu in the fight; but to this his warriors raised loud objections, saying, "What would become of Persia were aught to befall our Shah? The king shall not take this risk while we are yet alive. Gew and Gudarz and all of us in turn will first encounter Barzu if needs must be."

Meantime great Rustem had returned to his tent with intent to write to his nephew; but pain and grief hindered him both from writing and sleep. The long hours dragged wearily past, but at length the welcome light of the sun returned with another day, and, to the joy of Rustem, there came to him a messenger, in hot haste. "Feramurz thy nephew," said he, "is in the camp, and will be with thee immediately."

Then, before he could realise the truth, the young man was before him, weary and worn with his long journey, but eager to fulfil his commands.

"How didst thou know that I needed thee, O my nephew?" cried Rustem as he embraced the youth once more; and Feramurz replied: "The Bird of Marvel that watched over thy father's childhood and thine own birth bade me come to thee in haste. And so I left all and hurried to thee from the far land in which I was."

Then Rustem hastened to give him food and refreshment, after which both slept for a while, and awoke in due course refreshed and glad.

The two armies were now drawn up, waiting for the renewal of the combat. Feramurz was the first to appear, and dressed in the armour of Rustem, carrying his weapons, and riding upon Rakush his horse, he presented

a gallant figure. Barzu, strong as an elephant in his pride and confidence, rode forth at once to meet him, and the two champions took their stand in the middle space between the armies. Then Feramurz bent his bow and shot an arrow at his adversary, crying, "Behold me! Once more am I come, as yesterday, to try thy strength! Advance!" "Why art thou so full of joy?" asked Barzu surprised. "Art thou weary of thy life?" To which Feramurz replied: "To noble warriors the field of battle is as the house of pleasure." Some change of voice or action, however, roused the suspicions of Barzu, who said: "Is my foe of yesterday dead or sick that thou hast mounted his horse and ridden forth in his armour?"

"Indeed!" jeered Feramurz. "Perhaps thou art afraid to meet him once again."

"What is thy name?" asked Barzu.

Feramurz replied with his uncle's battle-cry of "Rustem!" and without more ado flung himself upon the giant with such force that he was all but hurled from his saddle. And before he could recover, Feramurz threw his noose and secured his enemy tightly in its folds. Instead of putting him to death, however, as he might have done, he carried him off to Kai Khosroo.

And now when Afrasiab saw his champion captured he at once put the whole army in motion to rescue him: but in expectation of this Kai Khosroo had advanced at the same moment. A great battle followed, in which the attempts to rescue Barzu were repulsed, and when night approached, both armies fell back to their positions.

The camp of Afrasiab was full of woe and wailing for the loss of Barzu that night; and when the king took counsel with Peran-Wisa as to their course of action, the old man advised a speedy retreat from the land of Persia.

So next day the army of Afrasiab marched back to its own land.

Meantime the Shah of Persia, overjoyed at the success of his warriors, made a great banquet; and while he sat at table the young giant Barzu was brought before him in chains. And Kai Khosroo would have put him to death had not Rustem pleaded for his life. The large-hearted warrior was sorry for the young man, who, despite his loud boasting, had fought so bravely, and he forgave him the hurt he had done him, and prevailed upon the Shah to deliver him into his hands; whereupon Barzu was forthwith sent in chains to one of Rustem's castles on the Persian frontier.

Now when the mother of Barzu learnt what had befallen him she wept bitterly, and hastened in secret to the place where he was imprisoned. There she found among Rustem's slaves a singing-girl, whom she had known in bygone years, and to her she gave presents, that she might win her confidence. And when the singing-girl was ready to serve her, she bade her carry unto the prisoner a loaf of bread in which was hidden a ring with a flashing signet stone.

When Barzu saw this ring he knew it as his father's, which his mother wore constantly hung from her neck, and asked eagerly who had sent him the food. The girl replied as she had been told:

"A woman from a far land."

Then Barzu knew it was his mother, and was full of joy; and he bade the girl bring to him a file that he might free himself from his chains. This was quickly procured for him, and one dark night he clambered over the wall, and, mounting one of three fleet horses tethered below his cell, fled with his mother and the singing-girl.

Now it so happened that Rustem, who had gone a-hunting in the forest and was returning to the castle, met the fugitives in the way. At first they tried to escape, but Rustem recognised his own horses, and furiously rode after Barzu and obliged him to fight. This he was by no means reluctant to do, though he feared for the safety of his two companions. Both being unarmed, they dismounted to wrestle, tying the bridles of their horses to their own girdles. But in the struggle Rakush so bit and kicked the other steed that Barzu was dragged along by his affrighted animal, being at the same time held back by the iron grip of Rustem. "O release me, I pray thee, for an instant, till I am free from my horse," cried the young man.

"Nay, why should I spare thy life a second time?" replied Rustem. Then the mother of Barzu, fearing that her son would be slain, cried out: "Rustem, hold thy hand, and forbear to kill thine own grandson, the child of Sohrab. Do not bring upon thyself the anguish that followed that other unnatural strife, and pause ere thou shedd'st a kinsman's blood."

Then Rustem's hand fell, and he said: "Can this thing be true?" And the mother showed him Sohrab's signet-ring.

Then was Rustem full of joy and thanksgiving; and he embraced his grandson warmly, and took him and his mother away to the province of Zal, where they resided in honour with him as long as he lived.

But as for Afrasiab, the loss of his champion enraged him beyond measure; and he gave orders to his cup-bearers, to say to him each day when presenting the royal cup: "O my master, remember Rustem and the wrong he hath done thee by Barzu thy knight."

Now one day when the king was lamenting his many

defeats, there stood in his path a woman named Susen, a famous sorceress, learned in all forms of magic. "O king," said she, "against such an one as Rustem thy sword and mace are useless playthings, and if thou wouldst overcome him put thy trust in me, and by the aid of spells and charms he shall soon be destroyed."

At first Afrasiab was too disheartened to heed her words, for he said, "What can a woman do where so many men have failed?"

Then the sorceress bade him fix his eyes steadily upon her; and as he did so she changed herself swiftly into a cat, and again, before he had time to speak, into a beautiful maiden, who said in a winning voice: "What will my lord the king give unto Susen the Sorceress when she brings to him the head of Rustem in a bag?" So Afrasiab promised her anything she might ask if she would do this; and first of all she demanded the aid of a trusty warrior, with abundance of treasure, jewels, and money. So Pilsam was appointed to help her, and with his assistance she conveyed the treasure to a large and handsome house on the borders of Persia, which she adorned with great magnificence.

Within the doors of this house she received, with Pilsam's aid, all travellers who passed that way, entertaining them royally with sparkling wine, and rare meats, and mellow fruit.

Meantime, while these things were happening, Rustem had made a magnificent banquet in his palace in the province of Zal his father, and had bidden to the feast all the most renowned heroes in the kingdom. And it so happened that Gudarz and Tus, never the best of friends, became very quarrelsome at this banquet. Tus, always puffed up with pride of ancestry, taunted Gudarz with

his descent from a blacksmith, he himself claiming Feridoon as his ancestor.

"How dost thou make thyself mine equal?" said he, scornfully. Then Gudarz reminded him of all the former errors he had made, of his ignorance and foolish deeds: which so irritated the hot-headed prince that he drew his dagger and would have killed him on the spot, had not Reham interposed and forced Tus to put up his weapon. This interference so enraged him that he started up from the table and set off in hot haste for his own city. Now Rustem had not heard of the dispute, and when he noted the absence of Tus, and was told of the quarrel and his departure, he was very angry; for he said that Gudarz was his relation and Tus his guest, and that Gudarz ought to have shown honour to Tus instead of reviling him.

"A guest," said he, "should be held as sacred as a king, for 'tis an old saying among heroes, 'A guest is the king of the feast.'"

Then he bade Gudarz hasten after Tus and bring him again to the banquet with kind words and excuses; and so Gudarz unwillingly departed. He had not been gone long when Gew, who had watched what had passed with much uneasiness, said to Rustem: "My father, Gudarz, is old and of hasty temper, and Tus is so inflamed with wrath that he is no better than a madman. Permit me, then, to follow after them, and prevent the renewal of the quarrel."

To this Rustem gave his consent; and scarcely had he gone when Byzun, filled with anxiety, begged to be allowed to follow him, saying that it would take at least two to prevent a quarrel.

When all these had departed, Rustem, on further thought, began to fear that a general fight between the

four warriors might take place, and so he thought it prudent to send Feramurz after them to endeavour to keep the peace. The sound of his horse's hoofs had barely died away when the aged Zal, who had been very ill at ease during these proceedings, declared that he feared that Tus was so deeply offended that neither Gudarz, Gew, Byzun, nor Feramurz would be able to appease him, and he announced that he would himself go and reconcile the difference which had so unhappily arisen. So he, too, set off in haste after the others.

Meantime Tus, still hot and seething with wrath, was journeying with haste to his home, by a road which brought him near the abode of Susen the Sorceress. Through the wide open door he saw, as he approached, long tables spread in readiness for a sumptuous meal, and cooks and confectioners were hurrying about with trays of rich foods and fruit.

The smell of the food and the brightly lighted apartment were a great attraction to the tired and hungry Tus, and he stayed to make inquiries of the servants. He was told that the place belonged to the wife of a rich merchant, who kept open house by day and night, and entertained in the most extravagant manner all travellers who passed by. Weary and hungry as he was, Tus dismounted on hearing this, and, entering the guest-chamber he was immediately received by a beautiful woman, tall as the cypress, with hair of silk and face as fair as moonlight. Her loveliness filled him with admiration and he eagerly besought her to tell him who she was. She replied that she had once been a singing-girl, and, having married a rich merchant, had been left at his death with a fine house and great wealth. She added, moreover, that her great wish was to enter the service of

Kai Khosroo, since he was a true king and of sweet and gentle temper.

Tus promptly offered to conduct her into the presence of the king, at which suggestion she seemed much pleased, but she begged him first to rest and eat. To this he readily agreed, and took his seat at the banquet, but before he had drunk more than one goblet of wine his senses forsook him; for food and wine were both charmed. Then Pilsam entered, and, binding him securely with cords, he hid him away in the inner part of the building.

Scarcely had this happened when Gudarz arrived at the house, and, attracted by the lights and food, he also dismounted, under pretext of asking if Tus had passed that way. He was easily persuaded to refresh himself before proceeding on his journey, and within a very short time was also secured and hidden away.

Then came Gew and Byzun; and they too were treated in the same manner; but Feramurz mistook his path, and so allowed Zal to overtake and pass him. Following hard upon Gew and Byzun came Zal; but he was too wise to be caught by such treachery, and would neither enter the enchanted apartment nor taste the charmed food and wine. Yet before riding on he examined the roadway, and noted that the recent tracks of four horses stopped at the door and were seen no more; and his mind misgave him for the fate of the four warriors. "Tell me," he cried, leaping from his horse and grasping the robe of the Sorceress, who had come out to persuade him to enter, "where are the four horsemen who stayed to drink at thy door?" But she broke from him and ran into the house, fastening the door behind her. Zal instantly despatched his servants for Rustem with the news of his suspicions, and then, exerting all his strength,

managed to break down the door and enter the house. But he was met at the entrance by Pilsam, armed with a huge club, who furiously attacked him ; it would have gone hard with the aged warrior, had not Feramurz come up at that moment, and, begging Zal to stand aside, engaged Pilsam in a desperate conflict, which lasted until night. When morning dawned, the noise of horsemen was heard, and the gigantic figures of Rustem and Barzu his grandson were seen approaching. Rustem stayed only to assure himself that his aged father had received no hurt. Then he called upon Pilsam to come forth, and, finding that no escape was possible, and that the army of Afrasiab was close at hand, the Tartar warrior at length appeared and attacked Rustem with magic weapons. But against that hero all charms were useless. The strife lasted for many hours, and dreadful was the conflict ; but in the end the strength and warlike skill of Rustem prevailed, and with a last effort he stretched his adversary lifeless on the sand.

Meantime Susen the Sorceress had fled to Afrasiab, who was approaching the scene at the head of his army. He was full of wrath at the failure of her schemes ; but he had little time to discuss matters, for Rustem waited only to release the four unhappy prisoners before making a furious attack upon him with the troops that Barzu had now brought to his aid. These scanty forces were soon joined by the army of Kai Khosroo , and a great battle followed.

> The steely javelins sparkled in the sun,
> Helmet and shield, and joyous seemed the sight,
> Banners, all gorgeous, floating on the breeze,
> And horns shrill echoing, and the tramp of steeds
> Proclaimed to dazzled eye and half-stunned ear
> The mighty preparation.

And, overcome by the superior prowess of the Persians, the Tartar host was once again obliged to flee.

Then Peran-Wisa came before Afrasiab and reproached him for his rashness, saying, "Wherefore dost thou persist in fighting against Rustem? Dost thou not know that our army has lost all heart and confidence when opposed by him? How often have we been defeated by him? How often have we been scattered like sheep before a lion? We have lost the aid of Barzu and thou hast put thy trust in a woman's deceitful ways, which have led to the ruin of thy country and the risk of thine own life. What folly is thine!"

Afrasiab was cut to the heart by these words, and without replying he spurred his horse into the middle of the plain, and with a loud voice called on Kai Khosroo to meet him in single combat, crying, "Too long have we been content to spill the blood of our warriors. Let us ourselves decide the battle, and may God help the right."

Instantly Kai Khosroo dismounted from his elephant, and, leaping upon his battle-charger, rode forward to accept the challenge. But his warriors seized the bridle of his horse and held him back, declaring that he should never be allowed to risk his life in single combat. In vain he reminded them of the death of Saiawush, and of the revenge which he, as his son, was bound to exact. They heeded not his commands and struggles, and presently, called Rustem to their aid. And he said: "Forbear to do this thing, O king, for Afrasiab is very skilful in the use of all weapons, and escaped even my strong arm when I had him in my very grasp. Allow thy warriors to fight for thee, for they are always ready."

But still the Shah persisted, and said, angrily: "The

king who does not fight for himself is not worthy to wear the crown."

Then Rustem wept with shame because Kai Khosroo would not regard his words. And Barzu knelt before the king and, placing his stirrup upon his head and drawing his dagger he threatened to kill himself on that very spot, saying, "My blood will be upon thy head if thou goest to the fight."

Then was Kai Khosroo moved by these words, and he said to Rustem: "It is easy to see that Barzu is descended from thee, O strong in counsel as in war." Then Barzu, glad at having gained his point, leaped upon upon his horse and rushed into the middle space with roar of defiance to Afrasiab.

Then Afrasiab's brow grew dark with wrath, and he said with furious voice: "Dost thou, whom I taught to fight, turn thine arms against me? O thou viper of the demon brood, who knowest not thy father's name, art thou not ashamed to look upon my face?"

But Barzu answered boldly: "I knew not in those days that thou wast the murderer of Saiawush. And when I ate thy salt I served thee faithfully and fought for thee. But now I eat the salt of Kai Khosroo, and my service is due to him." So saying he raised his battle-axe to strike: but the wily Afrasiab took his bow and made a skilful shot and wounded Barzu in the side very sorely. He would not give in, however, and continued to fight with desperate strength until at length one of Afrasiab's warriors, sent by Peran-Wisa, rode up and begged the king to retire, saying that such an opponent was not worthy of a king and reminding him of the fate of their country should his royal life be lost. So he agreed to leave the fight, but bade them kill Barzu at all costs. And

they would soon have done this, for the youth's strength was failing him, had not Rustem and Feramurz hastened to his help. Then the combat came general, and once again was the Tartar host conquered and Afrasiab forced to flee. Kai Khosroo would have followed after, but Rustem persuaded him to retire and allow his warriors to return to their homes. Then he obtained leave to depart to his own city; for, said he, "I am now full of years and may fitly claim a little rest."

And once more the land of Persia was at peace.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF PERAN-WISA AND AFRASIAB HIS KING

IN spite of the many defeats of Afrasiab it seemed as though he would never rest until Persia were overcome, and he now sent messages to all his nobles that they should gather great armies and come together to fight against Kai Khosroo yet once again. And he said unto them : " Think not of peace and take no rest until Kai Khosroo is a prisoner in our hands."

And he placed Shydah his son at the head of the combined forces.

Now when this was known, the Shah of Persia called upon his hosts to make them ready for the conflict, and because he knew that Rustem was very weary of the battlefield he entrusted the command to Gudarz the Wise, saying, " Rustem has won for us great glory in many a war. It is now thy turn, O Gudarz, to vanquish the enemy." But before they set out upon their journey to meet the foe Kai Khosroo sent again for Gudarz, and bade him do all in his power to bring over Peran-Wisa to the side of Persia before engaging in the conflict. " For," said he, " he was good to me in my youth, and it grieves me sorely that I should go out against him."

So when Gudarz had passed beyond the Persian borders

he sent Gew his son to speak words of peace to Peran-Wisa. But the old man would not give ear to his words, saying that honour compelled him to lead forth his army against the force of the Shah and to fulfil the commands of his master.

So the two armies drew up in face of one another, and each waited for the other to begin the attack. And Gudarz meantime consulted the astronomers, and read with them the face of the moon and sun and stars, that so he might know what it would be best to do; but Byzun, the son of Gew, was impatient to begin the conflict, and he mocked at his grandsire, saying, "He thinks more of the sun and moon than of the enemy." And he prayed his father to begin the conflict, regardless of Gudarz; but Gew would not listen to him. On the other side Human, a warrior of the Tartar race, was also burning to commence the fight, and he declared that rather than stand inactive he would challenge the Persian nobles in single combat. Peran-Wisa sought to dissuade him, but in vain; he leapt upon his horse, and, riding up to the Persian lines, challenged Reham, the son of Gudarz, to try his strength against him. But Reham answered: "Much as I long to meet thee in the combat, O Tartar warrior, I cannot disobey the commands of my father. Go back, then, and remember that he who first seeks the way to the battlefield has no need to find the return road."

Then Human mocked him, saying, "I had heard that Reham was a valiant knight, but it seems that he is but a coward after all." And forthwith he rode to the station where Friburz stood, and he challenged him also, saying, "Art thou too a coward? Surely thou art brother to Saiawush, and there should be some spark of valour in

thee." Friburz longed sorely to accept this challenge, but restrained himself.

"Go thou to Gudarz," he said, "and ask him if I may fight with thee; and if he gives permission it will rejoice my heart for ever."

But Human said scornfully: "Fine words ill become one who is a hero only in his speech"; and then, turning away, he rode up to the tent of Gudarz himself, where he shouted words of defiance and insolence, crying that he was afraid to lead the army out to battle.

But Gudarz paid no heed whatever to his words; and so Human returned to his camp, and gave out that the troops of Persia were full of terror and dared not begin the fight. The soldiers of Afrasiab were overjoyed to hear these words, and they shouted aloud and mocked the Persians; and the Persians, when they heard the noise, were cut to the heart. Then did they hasten to the tent of Gudarz with reproaches that they were made a mockery to their enemies. Byzun was like unto a raging lion, so great was his wrath; and Gudarz, seeing that all were against him in this matter, could not resist his grandson. "Go thou and accept the challenge of this Human," said he, at length. "Take to thyself the armour of Saiawush, and may Heaven grant thee victory."

So Byzun hastened away to arm and to prepare for the conflict. And when Human heard of his approach he rode out joyfully to meet him, crying, "Byzun, take thy farewell of Gew thy father, for he will not know thee when thou returnest to him again."

And Byzun retorted: "Talk not so much, but show if thou canst fight." So the conflict began; and as each fought his best and was fairly equal in strength, the victory was to neither side, and sunset drew nigh before

the matter was decided. But as the sun was sinking into the mists of evening Byzun made a great effort, and, seizing Human in his arms, flung him violently to earth, and there despatched him. And thus Saiawush was at length avenged, for Human had struck the fatal blow on that day of blood. And Byzun rode back to the Persian camp carrying the head of Human upon his spear: and the Persians shouted with joy at that sight. But the host of Afrasiab wailed aloud; and Peran-Wisa, stricken with grief and disappointment, commanded the armies to advance to the attack.

Then was there fought a very terrible battle, for the warriors of Afrasiab were desperate and like men beside themselves with wrath and fear. And the earth ran red with blood and the sky was dark with arrows. The ground was so covered with the bodies of the slain that the leaders said: "If this battle is not stayed ere long, not a man will be left alive on either side."

At length night fell, and the armies withdrew to their tents. Then the leaders met to consider what should be done; and they settled that men should be chosen as champions from either side to decide the issue; for it was not their wish that the armies should be utterly destroyed.

Morning came, and ten valiant champions, chosen from either side, rode forth upon the plain. Now a mountain rose on either side, and Gudarz and Peran-Wisa said, each to his own men: "When one of us has overcome his foe, let him mount this hill and plant there the flag he has won upon its crest, that each side may know who has been vanquished."

Then each man stood and faced his opponent; and Friburz was the first to strike a blow. And he laid low the Tartar warrior at the first onset, and rode joyfully up

The Death of Peran-Wisa

the mountain and planted the standard of the dead man on the crest.

Now Gew was opposed to the warrior who had cut off the head of Saiawush. He would not kill him, therefore, but took him alive in his snare that he might show unto Kai Khosroo the murderer of his father. And so it was that all the champions of Afrasiab were laid low in turn, and their standards were planted on the mountain-top, till only the aged Peran-Wisa and Gudarz were left. And these hoary warriors fought long and desperately the battle which was to be the last for one of them, while on either side the remnants of the armies watched the conflict with bated breaths. But dread Fate was this day against the Tartars, and their last champion fell before the might of Gudarz, and the glory of Peran-Wisa was extinguished in eternal night. Then the Persian army shouted madly in their joy, and swift messengers were sent to bear the tidings to Kai Khosroo. But the Shah wept when he heard of the death of Peran-Wisa, his benefactor, and grieved for him full sore. And he caused a royal tomb to be made for the good old man, and laid him therein with much honour. Then he turned and smote the army of Afrasiab, and drove them in confusion from the land.

The doleful tidings of the death of Peran-Wisa were also borne swiftly to Afrasiab, and his heart fainted within him. And he cried aloud :

"Thou wert my refuge, thou my friend and brother !
Wise in thy counsel, gallant in the field,
My monitor and guide—and thou art gone !
The glory of my kingdom is eclipsed,
Since thou hast vanished from this world, and left me
All wretched to myself. But food, nor sleep
Nor rest will I indulge in, till just vengeance
Has been inflicted on the cruel foe."

Then he dug up all his hidden treasure, and furnished therewith a very great army; and Kai Khosroo also assembled his host, and sent a message unto Rustem, begging that he would come to his aid.

When Afrasiab heard this he added another hundred thousand men to his forces; but before putting the vast army in motion he sent his son Shydah as ambassador of peace to Kai Khosroo, saying, "If he does not agree to my terms, tell him that to avoid the horrors of wholesale warfare it is necessary that he and I decide this quarrel in single combat. And if he will not fight with his grandsire, then say that thou wilt meet him, and that if he slays thee I will surrender to him my kingdom and live the rest of my life in solitude." And this was the message that Shydah delivered with fearless and valorous bearing on behalf of the king: "Should the hand of a grandson be turned against his grandsire to shed blood? And if thou speakest to me of Saiawush, I tell thee that he was justly slain, for he was a traitor to his king. If thou sayest that I am evil, and born of the evil ones, remember that thou too art of my race. Cease therefore to strive against me, and think no more of the death of Saiawush. Rather let there be peace between us; and in earnest of my friendship I will give thee great store of jewels and precious stones, and gold."

When Kai Khosroo had read this message and had heard the words of Shydah he withdrew with some of his chosen counsellors. "Afrasiab bade me choose between fighting with him or his son if I reject the terms of his proposal," said he. "Now Shydah is young, but he is fierce and warlike to look upon; what, therefore, shall I do?"

Then Rustem and the other counsellors declared that the Shah should not be allowed to fight either with Afra-

siab or his son, for the latter was full of treachery, and would seize any opportunity which chance might give him of putting an end to his father's mortal foe. And they advised that he should dismiss Shydah with a promise to send an answer by his own messenger. But Shydah looked into the Shah's eyes and said: "Art thou, then, afraid to fight me?" Whereupon the Shah declared that honour required him to accept the challenge; yet was he sorry, for he had looked upon the youth with eyes of favour. So next day the two faced each other, and it was agreed that they should wrestle together; and though he exerted all his strength, the son of Afrasiab had no chance against Kai Khosroo, who, exhausting the strength of his adversary, lifted him at length in his arms like a babe, and flung him upon the plain and slew him.

Meantime his answer had been sent to Afrasiab in these words: "No question of peace can there be between me and thee, for not the death of Saiawush alone, but all the treachery and evil thou hast wrought in this land must be avenged. Look to thyself, therefore, for thy throne shall not long endure."

When he received this message and heard of the death of his son, the Tartar king instantly marched against the Persian host. And yet again in the battle that ensued was he defeated and forced to flee, with Kai Khosroo following hard after him. Nor could he find refuge in the neighbouring kingdom, for the sovereign of that state was so terrified by the threats of Kai Khosroo that he would not give him protection. Then he turned unto the nobles of his own provinces; but they also were afraid to receive him, and there was no place where he might lie hid. For two weary years did he wander thus from one spot to another, and everywhere he was found by Kai

Khosroo and forced to flee again. At length, well-nigh weary to death, he crept one day into a cavern on the mountain-side, hoping to find rest therein ; and as he lay and thought of all the evil he had done he broke into loud lament. Now there lived hard by a hermit of the race of Feridoun ; and, hearing a voice proceeding apparently from the ground, he listened carefully and caught these words : " O King of the World, where is now thy former pomp and power ! How art thou brought low who wast once so high ! "

Then the hermit said to himself : " This is the voice of Afrasiab " ; and he remembered all the evil done by the king to the men of his race.

So he came to the mouth of the cave, and cried " Come out, O king of the World, and thou shalt obtain thy desires."

Thinking that some gracious spirit had come to his aid, Afrasiab appeared ; whereupon he was immediately seized by the hermit, who bound him and conveyed him to Persia into the presence of Kai Khosroo.

Then the Shah reproached his fallen enemy with the wicked deeds of his long life, and, reminding him of the death of Saiawush, he ordered that his head should be struck off with that self-same sword.

And when this was done the Shah sent a message of peace throughout all his provinces ; for the long feud was ended, and the land might now have rest. Great was the joy in every part of that country, and men put away their weapons and devoted themselves with gladness to the arts of peace.

But the land of Afrasiab became a desert, so that men said of it : " The spider hath woven his web in the imperial palace, and the owl hath sung her watch-song on the towers of Afrasiab."

CHAPTER XIX

HOW KAI KHOSROO FOUND HIS REST

NOW Kai Khosroo had ruled over the land for many long years in peace and prosperity, when at length he grew uneasy in mind and said to himself: "How do I know that this state of happiness will continue? It is well that I should remind myself that I am of the race of Zohak, and that at any moment I may become, like him, a curse unto the state. Therefore, I will retire from the work of ruling, now that there is no longer war on the earth, and live a life of solitude and prayer." So he withdrew himself from the sight of men and denied admission to those who would have speech of him, and, having taken off the symbols of royalty, he bathed himself in running water and remained for seven days in prayer.

Meantime the nobles of Persia were much concerned when they found that audience was denied them. And being troubled they said:

"Let us send for Rustem and Zal, that they may advise us in this difficulty; perchance they may persuade the Shah to listen to their words."

So a messenger was sent in haste, and meantime, before he could return, it came to pass that Kai Khosroo came forth from his solitude and entered his audience-chamber.

And his nobles bowed themselves before him and entreated that he would tell them the reason of his strange withdrawal. Then he made answer in words that were dark to them :

" The time is not yet, but in the end my desire shall be fulfilled. Be not anxious nor downcast, however, but return to your homes in peace." Then he retired again into seclusion, and commanded that no man be allowed entrance into his courts ; and he prayed very earnestly that he might know the will of God.

Now one night, as he slept, there came in unto him a shining One who said : " Be of good cheer, for thou hast done what is right in the sight of God and hast finished the work He gave thee to do. And thy rest is near. But first, choose thou from among thy warriors one who is worthy to rule ; and see that he be one who cares for all created things, even for the tiny ant that creepeth on the wall. And then shall the time of thy departure be come."

At these words the heart of Kai Khosroo was filled with joy and gladness ; and he returned to his people once again.

Meantime Zal and Rustem had reached the city ; and everywhere they found men lamenting the sad change that had come over their beloved Shah, whom they believed to be under the influence of a demon.

Then they came in unto Kai Khosroo, who received them with much honour, and presently enquired wherefore they had come. Then Zal said to him : " Far away in mine own province I have heard that the Shah has turned his face from his sorrowful people. And now have I come that thou mayst tell me thy trouble, that together we may remove it from thy heart. But take heed, lest, persisting

in this course, thou followest in the way of Zohak and Afrasiab and forget the thing that is right." Then Kai Khosroo looked gently on the aged counsellor and said: "O Zal, wise as thou art, in this thou knowest not what thou sayest. For I have talked with God, and I know that my end is near." When the nobles heard this they were filled with grief; but Zal grew angry and said: "Never yet have I heard a Shah speak words like these. I pray thee, listen to me, an aged man, and return to thy work of ruling, and forget what thou believest thou hast heard." But still Kai Khosroo persisted, and presently he told him of his heavenly visitor; and so at length both Zal and Rustem were convinced; and both wept and embraced him, saying, "O Kai Khosroo, beloved of all men, most bitter is the thought of thy loss."

Then the Shah embraced them all, and said:

"That which I sought for I have now obtained;
Nothing remains of worldly wish, or hope,
To disappoint or vex me. I resign
The pageantry of kings, and turn away
From all the grandeur of the Persian throne.
Now, farewell!
Such is my destiny. To those brave friends
Who, ever faithful, have my power upheld,
I will discharge the duty of a king,
Paying the pleasing debt of gratitude."

Having spoken thus solemnly, he commanded his nobles to assemble their armies upon the plain in due array. In the midst of them the crystal throne of royalty had been set up, and Kai Khosroo, crowned and wearing the girdle of might, took his seat with Rustem on his right hand and Zal on his left. Then he spoke wise words unto the soldiers and warned them of the importance of living aright, since the span of life was but brief; after

which he ordered his treasurer to distribute gold and armour and jewels among those who had grown old and weary in his service. To the greater nobles he distributed in turn the many provinces of his land ; and he gave rich treasure unto Gudarz, bidding him be kind to the poor. To Zal and Rustem and Gew he gave very rich gifts, and thanked them for their services to him ; and yet he had not named his successor, so that all men wondered greatly who this should be.

At length Kai Khosroo called to him the youth Lohurasp, who was of royal blood and descended from the wise and merciful Husheng. And, putting the royal crown upon his head, he blessed him and showed him to the assembled Persians as their Shah.

But the nobles hesitated, for they hoped that Friburz, the son of Kai Kaoos, would have been their king. And Kai Khosroo was wroth with them, and said : " Ye know little of Lohurasp, but I am convinced that he will govern Persia in prosperity all his days. Salute him as your Shah therefore, if ye will not be counted rebels unto your former king." Then Zal said : " It is the king's will," and he made haste to do homage to Lohurasp ; and the multitude shouted with joy, and all acclaimed him with gladness as their Shah.

Thus did Kai Khosroo bid farewell to his people, and, resigning to his successor the pomp and cares of state, he rode off into the desert. But Zal and Rustem, Gudarz and Gew, Byzun and Friburz and Tus, his valiant warriors, followed closely after him. And as they went they wept to think of losing their dear master ; but he said unto them : " All is well with me ; wherefore do you weep and lament ? " Now after a journey of seven days Kai Khosroo turned and said to those who followed him : " Return now I

pray you, for I am about to take a path where there is neither food nor drink to be found; and I entreat you not to follow me, since you cannot go with me in the end."

Then Rustem and Zal and Gudarz obeyed the voice of the Shah, as they had done all their lives; and they rode back very sorrowfully. But the rest followed still, until their master came to a fountain of running water, where he dismounted and sat down to rest.

Then they drew near unto him; but he looked sadly at them, saying, "Why do ye trouble me? know ye not that my time of departure is at hand?" Long time he sat in deep meditation, and then, as the shades of night gathered around the scene, he rose slowly and bathed himself in the running water. Then he came to the warriors and said: "Now must you go quickly from this place, and see that ye linger not on the way, for a great storm shall arise, with a tempestuous wind that shall tear the trees from their native soil, and such a cloud of snow shall fall as was never known in Persia, Therefore, if ye do not return at once, ye shall all perish." Then Kai Khosroo withdrew from the small group; and as they stood hesitating, uncertain what to do, they saw him once again enter the water and instantly vanish before their eyes.

Then darkness fell, and they, overcome with weariness, sat down saying: "Let us wait here for a while, lest Kai Khosroo should return; and if not, we will search for him in the morning's light." Thus they forgot his last commands, and soon sleep had overtaken them. And as they slept a mighty wind arose, and a great storm; and when they awoke and tried to find the downward path, behold! it had quite vanished under the thick white snow. And they could not strive against the bitter wind

and the heavy snow, and they lay down again upon the earth, and were quickly hidden from the sight of man. And after many days there came searchers on the mountain-side for the long-lost warriors, who at length found their bones upon the ground; and they lamented their untimely fate, and made them a noble sepulchre. But no man ever found the spot where Kai Khosroo had left this earth and found his rest.

"Alas!" they said, "that one on whom
Heaven hath bestowed a mind so great,
A heart so brave, should seek the tomb,
And not his hour in patience wait.
The wise in wonder gaze, and say,
No mortal being ever trod
Before the dim supernal way,
And, living, saw the face of God!"

CHAPTER XX

HOW GUSHTASP WON HIS WAY

MANY years did Shah Lohurasp rule over the land of Persia in peace and prosperity ; and he had four sons, one of whom, Gushtasp by name, was a youth of great strength and spirit. Now this prince grew weary of his father's strict rule ; moreover the Shah looked upon him with so little favour that it seemed improbable that he would be selected as his heir. And because Gushtasp was ambitious and a born ruler of men, his spirit chafed at his inferior position, and taking a thousand horsemen he rode away to conquer a province for himself. Then Lohurasp was grieved at his departure and sent his second son that he might persuade him to return. He found Gushtasp, and reasoned with him so winningly that he undertook to go back if his father would promise that he should be named his successor, and meantime be accorded treatment due to the heir to the throne. To this however the Shah would not agree, and he spoke scornful words and blamed his son for his pride and independence. So Gushtasp set off again, but this time he went alone, and journeying to a distant country, began to look about for some way of earning a living. First of all he visited the Court and asked for employment as secretary to the king , for his handwriting was very beautiful. He was told he might find work of the kind, but that he must wait

many days for it. Now he was already very hungry, and having no means of buying food, he went to the master of of the camel drivers and asked for work. But here also there was no immediate prospect of employment, though the kindhearted man gave the starving suppliant a hearty meal. Strengthened by the food, Gushtasp ventured into a blacksmith's shop, and this time work was promptly given him. He did not keep it long, however, for so great was his natural strength, that to the amazement of all present, his first blow upon the anvil broke it into a thousand pieces, and the blacksmith in great wrath turned him out of the shop with many angry reproaches.

Much disheartened, the prince proceeded on his way until he came to a cornfield, in which he sat down and began to weep bitterly. Now a certain husbandman, to whom the corn belonged, came by that way and seeing the stranger, enquired the cause of his grief. So Gushtasp told him all his story, and finding the husbandman was also of the race of Feridoun the Mighty, they became friends and the man took him into his own house.

For some time the prince lived in the guise of a servant and helped his host in the fields ; but after a while an adventure befell him.

It so happened that the princess of that country had just come of age, and her father, the king, gave a great banquet, to which he invited all the noble youths of that kingdom, that she might choose a suitable husband from among them. Now just before the banquet the princess Kitabun, for so she was called, had had a vivid dream in which a handsome youth gave to her a rose branch, and she gave to him a bunch of roses ; and among all the invited guests none equalled the beauty of this dream youth, and the princess passed them over in contempt.

Next day an invitation was issued to all youths of royal birth, whether natives of the land or strangers ; and when Gushtasp heard of this, he said to the husbandman, " Let us also go, for we are of royal blood."

So they made their way to the palace, Gushtasp carrying a rose-branch ; and as he mounted the steps which led to the banqueting room, Kitabun saw him and cried, " My dream has come true ! "

Hastening from her balcony she gave the youth a bunch of roses which she held and Gushtasp immediately proffered her his branch.

When the king saw that his daughter showed favour unto one dressed in shabby clothes and of the appearance of a servant, he was very wroth, and would even have put her to death ; but his nobles begged him to spare her life, saying, " It is in vain to resist the flood of destiny."

Then the king made enquiries as to his parentage : but although Gushtasp told him the whole truth he would not believe a word of the story. Nevertheless his royal word had gone forth and he could not prevent the marriage ; but directly it was over he drove his daughter and her husband from the palace without gifts or money.

So Gushtasp was forced to take his young wife to a poor cell by the riverside, and for provender he crossed the ferry each day to a great forest and returned, sometimes with a wild ass, sometimes with a noble elk, giving half always to the ferryman for his trouble ; and thus they became great friends.

Meantime a prince named Mabin arrived at the king's court and asked permission to marry his younger daughter ; but the king was not willing to part with her. When he found, however, that the prince would not be denied, he thought to be rid of him by craft, and said :

"In the depths of the forest dwells a monstrous wolf, the scourge of my land. If you would win my daughter seek this monster and destroy him."

The task seemed impossible to Mabin, but one day as he walked sorrowfully by the riverside, the ferryman asked him the reason of his grief, and when he heard, he bid him be of good cheer. "For," said he, "I know a youth who goes into the forest and comes back every day with a wild ass upon his shoulders. If you can get him to help you, there will be no trouble in securing the most savage wolf."

Mabin was delighted to hear this, and hastened to the cell of Gushtasp, who willingly agreed to lend his aid: and the two men promptly took their way into the forest, accompanied by the ferryman. Presently Gushtasp left his companions, and going forward alone he came upon the wolf, whose appearance was calculated to strike terror into the boldest heart. Neither this nor the terrible howl with which it greeted him daunted the young prince, who promptly shot two arrows at the grisly monster. Then as it sprang at him, furious with rage and pain, he aimed so mighty a blow with his sword, that he well nigh clave the animal in two. Then he cut off its head and brought it to Mabin, who hastened with it to the king that he might claim his bride.

About that same time another prince appeared named Ahrun, who desired to marry the youngest of the three princesses. But the king was still more reluctant to lose this daughter, and declared that he would not bestow her hand upon Ahrun unless he should kill a fiery dragon that had long been devastating the land. Once again the aid of Gushtasp was suggested by the friendly ferryman, and the heroic youth at once undertook the difficult enterprise. This time he went alone and found the monster

on the slope of a steep mountain. Upon seeing the intruder flames gushed from its throat and nostrils, and it darted forward intent upon devouring him. Gushtasp had provided himself, however, with a deadly weapon in the shape of various knives fixed to the head of his spear at right angles, and he promptly thrust this into the fiery throat, and as the monster closed his jaws the knives bit deeply into the flesh and the dragon rolled over and over in his agony. Then Gushtasp seized a large fragment of rock and beat out its brains. It was now an easy matter to abstract the poison fangs, and Gushtasp took two of these to Ahrun who joyfully bore them to the king.

The king could no longer withhold the fulfilment of his promises, and after the marriages which ensued Gushtasp and Mabin and Ahrun became great friends, and their wives also bore each other much affection. And it came to pass that one day Kitabun told one of the women of the Queen her mother that Gushtasp, her husband, had killed the wolf and the dragon , and the Queen heard of it and told her husband saying "This is the work of that noble youth whom thou hast driven from thy presence." And the king repented him of his harsh conduct—and sending for Gushtasp he gave him the command of his army. Then Gushtasp went forth to war and conquered a whole province, which so delighted the king that he forthwith bade him prepare to invade the land of Persia.

And Lohurasp heard that an army was about to march against his land and he said : "Surely the king has gone mad that he thinks to fight against me ! What has put this thing in his mind ?" Then the messenger said, "There is a noble and comely youth within his borders who has destroyed a ferocious wolf and a fiery dragon and with great ease has conquered a whole province."

And the king said: "What is this youth like?"

"He is like unto thee, O King," the messenger replied.

Then the king sent for one of his sons and bade him seek the stranger youth, saying, "It is no other than thy brother Gushtasp."

And he sent messages promising that if Gushtasp would return to his native land he would resign to him his crown and his throne; for he repented of his former treatment. The arrival of his brother with this greeting filled Gushtasp with joy, for he did not wish to wage war against his father, and he forthwith took his wife and hastened to Persia to the home of his father. And Lohurasp gave up his crown and his throne, as he had promised, and Gushtasp reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STORY OF PRINCE ISFENDIYAR

EARLY in the reign of the new Shah there appeared in the land of Persia that great prophet who droveaway the evil ones, and taught men the faith by which all men might live aright. But when Arjasp, who sat upon the throne of Afrasiab, heard of this he wrote haughtily to Gushtasp, threatening him, and saying, "If thou dost not at once turn out this false prophet, I will ravage thy kingdom and rule over it myself."

To this Gushtasp returned instant answer, "Thou dost boast in easy words that thou wilt overcome my kingdom, but I tell thee that a hundred thousand of my warriors, clad in shining steel, are even now ready to crush thy head beneath their feet."

At the head of this great army Gushtasp set his son Isfendiyar, a gallant youth, promising that if he should be victorious he would give up to him the throne and crown of Persia. When the rival forces came into collision a terrible battle took place. Demons fought on the side of Arjasp, and their leader killed all the younger sons and the brother of the Shah, and the battle was turning against Persia, when Isfendiyar rode his great black horse, Bezad, with impetuous fury against the demon who had destroyed his brothers and slew him. Then,

continuing his course, he made a rush upon Arjasp to take him prisoner.

But when the king saw the approach of the fiery prince his courage forsook him, and he fled; all his host were panic-stricken also, and followed after him, and so the victory lay with Persia.

Then Isfendiyar came in triumph to his father and reminded him of his promise; but Gushtasp said: "Nay, it is not right thou should'st have my crown when thou hast been a victor only once. Go thou and conquer other nations teaching them true faith, and then shalt thou be Shah in my stead." So Isfendiyar went forth into the wide world and conquered many nations, and taught them the faith; and when he had done this he sent letters unto his father, informing him of what he had done and asking what further he wished him to do.

Then Gushtasp bade his son return, and was about to prepare a great banquet in his honour when Gurzam, a warrior who had always been secretly hostile towards Isfendiyar, asked leave to speak unto the king.

"Isfendiyar has subdued all provinces of the world," said he, "but he has done this not for thee but for his own honour and glory. Even now he is preparing an army against thee, and intends taking thee prisoner. Moreover, he is hated by the army he has led; yet they fear him so much that they would not disobey his commands to march against thee." Then Gushtasp was filled with wrath, and he sent out messengers to bring Isfendiyar before him. The prince was surprised to find the king so angry with him, but quickly obeyed his commands and hastened into his presence.

The Shah received him coldly, and said;

"So thou hast become a great king in thine own sight! Thou hast indeed conquered many lands, but not thine own ambition. Why have I, thy father, become unworthy in thy sight?"

At these words Isfendiyar was greatly puzzled. He could only answer: "My father, however great I may be, I am still thy son and servant, and entirely at thy command." Then Gushtasp turned to his nobles and said: "I have a story to tell unto thee. There was once a father kind and just; and his son tried not only to wrest from him his authority, but to outdo him in grandeur, so that he might appear unworthy. What think you, ought to be done to such a son?" Then the nobles answered and said: "He should either be hanged or imprisoned in chains, otherwise his father will be ruined by his evil doings." "Thou hast well spoken," said the king; "let Isfendiyar be put into chains."

The unfortunate Isfendiyar bowed his head.

"The king it was who gave me all my honours," said he, "and the king it is who taketh them away. At his royal pleasure I willingly resign them." So the prince was led away to a tower situated upon a neighbouring mountain, and lay there bound in chains.

For many weary months he remained in this prison, and the heart of the Shah hardened towards him, and his soul was filled with bitterness.

Meantime, growing weary of ruling, Gushtasp departed to the distant province over which Zal and Rustem ruled, and there he stayed two years, amusing himself with the pleasures that they provided.

The land of Persia was thus left without a leader, and Arjasp determined to seize this opportunity of avenging the defeat of his army. He accordingly marched upon

Persia, and, finding the land unprepared to resist him, he fell upon the inhabitants with great slaughter, burnt all the palaces and temples of the land, and destroyed also the book of sacred writings, which was treasured within the sacred buildings.

Then a woman who had escaped from the household of Gushtasp hastened to the province of Zal and told the Shah of all that had occurred, and how the land was desolate. And the Shah gathered an army with haste to drive out the invaders; and he begged Rustem to go out also against them, but he would not, for he approved not the ways of Gushtasp. So the Shah himself led forth his host; but the Tartars were too strong for him, and he was utterly defeated, and forced to flee to a mountain fort. In this crisis the Shah knew not how to act, so he called together his nobles, that they might advise him; and when they had consulted the stars one of them said: "It is written in the book of Fate, O king, that Isfendiyar thy son alone can deliver the land. I counsel thee, therefore, to release him at once."

Thus Gushtasp was forced to release his son; but Isfendiyar's soul was full of bitterness, and he said: "All this time have I been kept in bonds until now, when my father has need of me. Why, therefore, should I wear out my strength in his cause? I will not go out to him, nor help him." Then they tried to persuade him, telling him that Gurzam the traitor should be delivered into his hands for punishment. But still Isfendiyar would not hearken. Then at length one said: "Thy brother is in bonds with Arjasp the king. Wilt thou not go to his aid?" At these words the prince sprang to his feet, and, shaking off his fetters as a lion shakes himself free of water, he hastened to go out unto his father; and they

were reconciled on that day, Gushtasp entreated that his harsh conduct should be forgotten, and lavished every honour upon his son. He appointed him to the principal command of the royal army, and promised to resign the crown to him, should he return victorious from the encounter with the invading army.

Then Isfendiyar went forth against the hosts of Arjasp, and his arm prevailed against them, and he drove them from the land, with great slaughter. But yet again Gushtasp's mean soul repented him of the promise he had made, and he bethought him of a means of evading its performance. "How canst thou wear the crown while thy sisters are still in Arjasp's prison, chained within a fortress of brass?" said he. "Go, therefore, and release them from captivity, and then shalt thou rule as Shah in the land."

And Isfendiyar said: "My only wish is to obey thy commands, O Shah." So he went forth, taking with him twelve thousand chosen horsemen and a captive of the former war, whom he released on condition that he should show the way to the brazen fortress of Arjasp.

Upon enquiry as to the route, the guide answered: "There are three roads. The first will take thee three months to traverse, but it is safe. The second will take two, but its way is through a desert without food. The third will take but seven days, but it is beset with dangers."

Isfendiyar at once chose the shortest path, saying, "A man can die but once." In vain his guide tried to prevent him, saying that all who had attempted this journey had been lost, and that though he would willingly accompany him on either of the other roads, it would be useless to try to lead him on the third;

for, said he, "Can I go where a bird has never dared to fly?"

Then the prince, doubting his fidelity, ordered him to be bound, and presently they entered a desert country, when the guide warned Isfendiyar, saying, "Two monstrous wolves frequent these parts. They are strong as elephants and their teeth are like long spears." Even as he spoke the two raging beasts rushed out upon the prince, who promptly slew them both, to the great astonishment of the guide. They rested that night, and as they were about to set out next day, the guide bade the prince beware, as that part of the road was infected with lions. "Then," said Isfendiyar, "thou shalt see how easily I can overcome them."

Presently as they advanced, the prince riding alone at the head of the cavalcade, a huge lion and lioness sprang upon his horse, one on either side. Addressing himself first to the lion Isfendiyar cut off its head with one stroke and then, turning his attention to its mate, he quickly despatched the lioness with another; and so once more they resumed their journey. On the third day the prince inquired as to what he was next to expect, and was told that an enormous dragon, whose roar shook the whole country side, and whose hideous fangs streamed with poison-foam, would waylay him on the road. To meet this danger Isfendiyar prepared a rough chariot to which were fastened many pointed weapons, and harnessing a number of horses to this, the prince seated himself upon it, and drove on at the head of his troops. He had not proceeded far when a terrible sound, as of some mountain avalanche, rent the air, and the next moment the dragon was seen rapidly approaching. This terrible sight melted the hearts of strong men like water; but with firm courage

the heroic prince guided his steeds straight at the cavernous jaws open wide to receive them, and the fiery horses plunged into their recesses. Then did the prince's followers bewail their leader as lost to them ; but meantime his chariot was working fell destruction within the monstrous maw. The knives and javelins pierced and lacerated it so terribly that full soon was the dragon compelled to disgorge its prey, and while it was all but exhausted by the effort, Isfendiyar leaped from his place of vantage and clave the monster's head with one mighty stroke. The prince was now ready for the next adventure, and was told that on the fourth day he would meet an enchantress who could turn land into sea and sea into dry land. Accordingly the next day Isfendiyar pushed on, and presently saw under a tree a beautiful maiden weeping bitterly. He could not forbear to question her, and she told him that she was a king's daughter and had been carried off by an enchanter to the wilderness, and she implored him to effect her deliverance. Isfendiyar replied so kindly that the enchantress—for it was she—hoped to impose upon him ; but he saw through her design, and as she rose to approach him in her plea for help he suddenly cast his noose fast round her. At once she underwent the most rapid changes—first into a cat, then into a wolf, then into a very old man ; but she could not escape from the toils, and at last wearied of her tricks, Isfendiyar took out his sword and cut her to pieces.

On the fifth day the course lay through desert, plain, mountain, and wilderness, until it brought the travellers to a narrow pass wherein was the nest of a mighty bird, which preyed upon men and women and ofttimes carried them for food to its young.

In order to successfully achieve this adventure, Isfendi-

yar once more prepared the car which he had used in his fight with the dragon; and in due course the Bird, seeing this strange object, swooped down and tried to carry it off in its claws and beak. The sharp knives and spears however, tore it so badly, that it soon became weak from loss of blood, and Isfendiyar found little difficulty in despatching it.

Then the guide said: "Thou canst indeed prevail against lions and dragons, women and birds, but to-morrow a mighty storm of wind and hail and snow will arise, and not one will escape with his life."

When they heard this, the soldiers were anxious to return, for they remembered the fate of the companions of Kai Khosroo, upon which the prince said: "Return if you will; but I am not so easily dismayed, and will advance alone." Then were his followers ashamed and they spake no more of returning.

The next evening, when the tents had been pitched after a long day's march, the predicted storm arose, and snow soon covered all the ground, so that no food could be obtained, and the men and horses were obliged to creep into the mountain caves for shelter from the cruel blast. After three days of intense misery, however, the snow vanished, and once more the force proceeded upon its way. But now the guide began again to entreat the prince to return, saying: "From here to the brazen fortress the way is covered with sand as hot as fire, and there is no water to be had. Neither bird nor fly nor ant can live there; not even the vulture dares to fly over that awful soil, and wert thou able to cross it thou couldst not hope to conquer the brazen fortress."

At this intelligence even the stout heart of Isfendiyar wavered; but nevertheless he cheered on his men and determined not to abandon his purpose.

Now when they reached the stretch of sand they found it quite cool to the touch ; and instead of fire they found a great river of water, difficult to cross. Then the guide confessed that he had purposely exaggerated these last perils, hoping to turn the prince from his purpose ; and this so angered the prince that he put him to a violent death. Soon after this Isfendiyar reached the brazen fortress, when he found to his dismay that it was surrounded by a wall of brass so thick that four horsemen could ride abreast upon it.

There seemed little hope that a fort so defended could be taken by storm, so Isfendiyar, dressed himself as a merchant, and, loading one hundred camels with treasure, he chose out one hundred and sixty sturdy warriors and placed them in boxes, upon the camels' backs. Then he led the caravan to the fortress, and asked leave of the keeper of the gate to enter, that he might sell his goods. Now Arjasp himself was within the fortress and called upon the seeming merchant to enter, that he might inspect his merchandise. So the chests were laid within the courtyard, and Isfendiyar prepared to display his treasures.

Now when he had shown the contents of his treasure-chests he obtained leave to defer the exhibition of his other wares until the conclusion of a banquet, to which he invited the king and his nobles ; and he brought from his store rich wine and cakes, and they made merry until the heads of Arjasp and his courtiers were heavy with drink. Then, when it grew dark, he opened his remaining chests, and the warriors came forth and slew the sleeping nobles while he himself made an end of Arjasp and his sons. Thus did Isfendiyar destroy the might of Arjasp ; and he returned in triumph to his father, bringing his two sisters, whom he had rescued from their captive state.

Now when he entered the court of his father, the Shah received him with every appearance of joy and affection.

He pressed his son to tell him all the details of the adventure; but while he praised his heroic conduct, a demon of envy and suspicion was writhing to and fro within his breast, and he hated him for the deeds he had accomplished.

And when Isfendiyar reminded his father of his promise, the Shah's countenance changed, and he looked no more with favour upon him. And he cast about for some way to escape from the fulfilment of his promise, and sent for a wise man that he might consult the stars as to the future destiny of his son. The first answer was highly favourable to the prince, for it said: "He is of high fortune and destiny; he will overcome all his enemies, and it shall be his fate to rule over the seven kingdoms of the world." This much displeased Gushtasp, and he bade the wise man look again and find out what should be the end of his son. And the second answer ran thus:

A deadly dart from Rustem's bow
Will lay the glorious warrior low.

Then was Gushtasp glad, and said within himself: "I will contrive a scheme whereby I shall bring about this fatal deed."

So he made a great banquet, and invited to it all his nobles and warriors, and Isfendiyar was the chief guest; and when all had refreshed themselves the Shah said to his son: "Thou hast indeed well earned the crown and the throne of Persia, and they are thine, but on one condition. Thou knowest that there is none to equal thee on earth save Rustem, the son of Zal, who thinks

himself lord of all men because of the deeds he hath done in the past. But when I was in distress and Arjasp had invaded my kingdom I called upon Rustem to come to my aid, and he would not. For he is grown so proud in spirit that he will not pay me homage nor acknowledge me as his king. Now therefore, I desire that thou wilt go unto his province and bring him before me in chains that he may know that I have the power over him of life and death. And when thou hast done this I swear unto thee by the sacred fire that I will give up the throne to thee and thou shalt be king."

Then Isfendiyar was troubled, and he said unto the king:

"Twice already thou hast made this promise unto me, but it has not been kept; and how shall I know that it will ever be fulfilled? In former days, when thou didst kill a wolf and a dragon thy father gladly gave to thee his crown; but I, who have done far more than this, have been rewarded with imprisonment and chains." But Gushtasp only said: "Art thou afraid of Rustem that thou dost shrink from the task?"

"I fear him not," replied the prince, "for he is now very old. But it is ill that thou shouldst seek to humble so great a man, and one whom our ancestors delighted to honour. For he was called the Champion of Persia in times past, and on his might and wisdom the whole land has oft depended. Thou wast, also, for two years his honoured guest, enjoying his hospitality and friendship. How then can I bring him to thee in chains?"

But Gushtasp only answered: "If thou doest not this thing the kingdom shall never be thine. Bring him here, bound hand and foot, and all people shall know that thou art invincible." Then Isfendiyar said bitterly: "I per-

ceive that this is but a plot to get rid of me, for no man yet has withstood the might of Rustem. Since, then, thou dost not wish me to have thy throne I desire it no longer."

And he turned away in wrath unto his own abode. Then a certain counsellor, privately sent by Gushtasp, went to him and persuaded him, saying, "Thy chief duty is to obey thy father's commands"; and so at length, very sorrowfully, Isfendiyar gathered his followers and set off for the province of Zal.

The cavalcade had not advanced very far, when the leading camel lay down, and neither blow nor coaxing would induce it to get up again. The prince at length ordered it to be killed, saying that thus the ill-luck would fall upon itself and not upon the Shah; but all looked upon the event as an evil omen, and went forward very sadly. Now when they came near to the borders of Seistan the prince sent Bahman, his son, to Rustem, begging him to honour him with a visit to the camp; and he bade Bahman tell Rustem how that the Shah, displeased at his haughty spirit, had commanded that he should be brought before him in chains; but at the same time he was to assure him that if he would submit to the indignity, and accompany Isfendiyar to the Persian court, no harm should befall him.

Then Bahman hastened to the palace of Rustem, and finding that Rustem had gone hunting he followed after, and found the hero sitting by the wayside engaged upon his evening meal. Rustem received him with kind words, and bade him sit and eat with him. And when Bahman had eaten and drunk he delivered the message of his father. When Rustem had heard all he looked at him gravely and kindly, and said: "Greet thy father warmly for me, and say I shall be glad to look upon his

face, for I have heard much that is good of him. But tell him also that his suggestion is the device of demons, and that it would be well that he departed not from the paths of the wise. Moreover, let him not count upon his own strength in this matter, for no man can stand against my might any more than he can shut up the winds within a cage. Nor hath any man ever seen Rustem in chains. Return, therefore, to thy father, and tell him that his words are foolish and are best forgotten. But bid him come with thee to my house and sit at the banquet that shall be ready; and when we have feasted I will ride with him into the presence of the Shah."

So Bahman hastened back to Isfendiyar and told him the words of Rustem. And when the prince heard them, he rode forth to meet the Champion, and they looked on one another from the opposite banks of a deep, wide river. Then good Rakush plunged into the water and brought his master safely to the other side, and Rustem greeted Isfendiyar with much affection and respect. The prince gazed upon the hero with the utmost reverence, for he had never seen a man like unto him.

And Rustem said: "O young man, let us talk together about these things which disturb our friendship, and enter thou into my house as my guest." But the prince replied: "How can I do that? For I am come to lead thee to my father in chains, and if thou wilt not go I must compel thee. And how should I use force to one whose bread and salt I have eaten? But come thou into my tent and eat with me, I pray thee."

"Not so," said Rustem gravely, "for by force I shall prevent thee from doing thy will upon me. And how can I do this when I have eaten with thee?" But Isfendiyar replied: "Thou needest not eat my bread

and salt, but bring thine own red wine and drink with me." So Rustem agreed to do this, and when he had departed Isfendiyar was full of heaviness, for he knew that what the Shah demanded was unjust and evil; and he said unto his brother, who had accompanied him: "This affair is altogether against my will, and I am filled with shame, so that I dare not enter the house of Rustem, nor can I sit treacherously with him at my table. I will not call him, therefore, to my feast." And his brother urged him to put aside the commands of Gushtasp, and to join Rustem in open friendship. But Isfendiyar said: "If I obey not the commands of my father I shall lose the respect of men in this world and the approval of the Almighty in the next." So he bade the banquet be served, but sent not to call Rustem to the feast as he had promised.

Rustem waited a long time, and then, his patience at an end, he mounted Rakush and rode to the tents of the prince, that he might know wherefore he had been treated with such seeming discourtesy. And when the warriors of Persia saw him they murmured against Gushtasp, saying, "This man is worthy of high honour rather than chains and imprisonment."

Meanwhile Rustem dismounted at the entrance of the banqueting tent, and said unto the prince: "I perceive, O youth, that thou didst not deem me worthy to be called unto thy feast. But in the days of old, men thought otherwise of him who stood as guardian of the Persian kings. Bethink thee whether this is fitting treatment of the Champion of Persia!"

Isfendiyar was deeply concerned at these words, and to excuse himself pleaded that he had thought the journey too toilsome for the hero. And he cast about in his mind how he might pick a quarrel with Rustem, for

unless anger should arise in his heart he knew not how he could hope to bring himself to injure the grand old warrior. So he motioned him to a seat on his left hand. But Rustem said angrily that he had never sat elsewhere than on the Shah's right hand; and he seated himself upon the right of the prince. Then they drank their wine in silence, till at length the unhappy Isfendiyar, seeking a new cause of quarrel, said with an effort: "Rustem, I have heard thy father Zal is of demon blood, and that a foul bird reared him on carrion food, until Sahm his father brought him to earth and instructed him in human ways."

This insult tried the patience of Rustem sorely, but nevertheless he answered calmly, "Thou knowest quite well that Zal my father is of royal blood; and I myself am also of the great ones of the earth, and many are the valiant deeds that I have done."

"I too have done deeds as great," broke in the prince.

"Can thy exploits be compared with mine?" rejoined the warrior.

At length Isfendiyar said: "We have boasted enough of our deeds; drink now thy fill, for to-morrow thou shalt meet me in battle and the days of thy feasting will be ended." At this Rustem laughed a kindly laugh. "Surely I will meet thee to-morrow in the fight," said he; "and when I have lifted thee from thy saddle I will carry thee to my house, and thou shalt eat and drink with me. Afterwards we will ride in friendship to the court of the Shah, and I will take away these evil suspicions from his heart; and when thou art king I will be thy loyal warrior." Then the prince was yet more ashamed and said: "Let us not talk of combat, but eat and drink while we may." So they turned themselves to the feast.

And when Rustem prepared to depart he again entreated the prince to be his guest in turn. But Isfendiyar said: "I cannot do this unless thou wilt consent to let me put chains upon thee and lead thee thus before Gushtasp. If thou wilt not, I must attack thee with sword and spear and take thee by force."

Then Rustem was sore vexed in his mind, for he could not agree to the demands of the prince, yet was he loth to do battle with him, for his love was strong towards him; and, moreover, he had never yet lifted his hand against the son of a Shah of Persia.

He said aloud, therefore: "I pray thee, talk no more of chains, and put this thought far from thee. Come thou instead to feast within my gates, and then will I ride forth with thee in friendship to thy father."

But Isfendiyar replied: "Not so, for I will not disobey the command of my sire. And if thou wilt not submit to his will I will meet thee to-morrow at sunrise, and thy proud head shall be brought low."

Then Rustem blazed out in passionate words:

"Rather prepare to meet thine own end, O foolish youth, for the man is already dead who rides against me"; and he strode forth in anger from the tent.

Now when he had told Zal all that had passed, the wise old man wept bitterly, saying, "If thou shouldst kill Isfendiyar, the son of the Shah, thy name will be infamous through all the world; and if he kill thee, all Persia will be prostrate with grief."

Next morning Rustem rode forth sadly on Rakush to the tent of Isfendiyar, crying in his deep voice: "Here am I, O thou prince of renown, come to fight with thee if so thou wilt."

And when Isfendiyar rode forth the Champion was still

loth to do battle with him, and he proposed that their armies should decide the matter. But to this Isfendiyar would not agree; for he had provided himself with magic armour, through which no dart could penetrate and was now eager to fight. So Rustem unwillingly seized his weapons, and the fight began.

Long did the battle rage, and both warriors fought with the utmost desperation. While Rustem suffered from many wounds, however, his opponent, protected by his magic armour was apparently uninjured. Rakush shared his master's ill fortune, and he received so many darts that he could scarcely stand for loss of blood; whereupon Rustem, seeing his poor horse's plight, dismounted from the steed. Then Rakush fled from the storm of darts, and galloped madly across the plain. When Rustem's favourite attendant saw Rakush riderless he was full of dismay, and hastened to his master's side. He found Rustem desperately wounded, but fully able to mount the steed which he now resigned to him. "Is the valiant Rustem quitting the field of battle?" said the prince tauntingly, "why art thou, the roaring lion, turned into a fox?" "I have not yet done with thee," cried Rustem: "I will meet thee again in the morning," and, turning, he rode from the spot with such an appearance of vigour that Isfendiyar could hardly believe his eyes.

But when Rustem reached his abode he sank down heavily, and his soul was as full of discouragement as his body of wounds. "I have found an opponent against whom strength and weapons do not avail," said he to Zal "I thank God that night has come to give me excuse for rest; but I cannot meet him to-morrow, and must needs find some secret place to hide me in, so that my name be nevermore heard on the earth." But Zal cheered

him, and said: "Dost thou not remember the three feathers of the Bird of Marvel, which we were to burn when in need? Let us, then, make trial of them in this our dire peril." So the old man went to the top of a mountain, and making a fire, he cast a feather into it; immediately the horizon grew dark and Zal perceived that this was caused by the gigantic pinions of the Bird of Marvel, who soon alighted before him, saying, "What is it that thou requirest of thy nurse, O my son?"

And Zal said: "My son Rustem is wounded nigh to death, and his horse also. Nought that I can do will cure him."

"Bring me unto them," said the Bird.

First he came to Rakush, and plucked the rankling arrows with his beak and passed his feathers over the wounds; and the steed was wholly restored. Then he turned to Rustem, and first speaking words of comfort, he sucked the poison from his hurts, which closed at his bidding; and immediately fresh life and vigour returned to the stricken hero.

Being thus marvellously restored, Rustem begged the Bird of Marvel to aid him with magic power against the might of Isfendiyar; but he said: "If it were possible, I counsel you to avoid the hand of this prince, for there is none so invincible as he. But if thou must meet him in battle, I will do what I can to help thee. Yet is it written that whoever sheds the blood of Isfendiyar will also perish, and while he lives shall know no joy in his life. If thou art ready to face this, come thou with me, and I will show thee how thou mayst overcome thine enemy." So saying, he flew away; and Rustem rode after until they came to a great river, the banks of which were covered with reeds.

Then the Bird rubbed the eye of Rustem with a feather, and bade him take the branch of a tamarisk tree which grew among the reeds and straighten it in the fire, and make of it a forked arrow. "Aim this," said he, "at the forehead of Isfendiyar, for only in his eyes can the prince be wounded."

Next morning Rustem, having prepared the arrow, rode off to the tent of Isfendiyar, and called to him thus: "Warrior, dost thou still sleep when Rustem standeth before thee?" Then Isfendiyar hastened from his tent in amazement, for he had felt certain that Rustem must die from his wounds. And he said to him: "This is a work of sorcery wrought by Zal thy father." But Rustem said: "Though thou wert to give me a thousand wounds I should still be unhurt in the end. Therefore once more I say unto thee, come into my house and be my guest, and then will I go with thee to thy father, but not in chains."

"This is all in vain," answered Isfendiyar. "I will not disobey the commands of the king." Then Rustem lifted his face towards the heavens and exclaimed: "O thou great mover of the hearts of men, thou knowest how I have sought to avoid this conflict. Visit me not in anger for the blood which I am forced to shed!" As the old hero uttered these moving words Isfendiyar sped an arrow, which Rustem dexterously eluded; and then, taking firm aim, as one conscious of the justice of his cause, the champion despatched his charmed arrow; and it lodged in the eye of the prince, so that he fell forward in agony on his horse's neck, and his bow fell from his hand. Then his distracted followers came running and laid their master upon the ground; and when he could speak he called for Rustem, who came and knelt beside him; and the tears of the slayer fell upon the forehead of the slain. Then

Isfendiyar said unto him : " Weep not, for the hand that hath slain me this day is not thine, but that of Gushtasp, my father. From the day I first heard thy name I have loved thee, O thou great of renown, and I never wished in my heart to kill thee. And to show that this is true, I give thee now my young son Bahman. Bring him up in thine own house, I pray thee, and teach him the arts of war. And when Gushtasp shall have passed away, I charge thee to place Bahman on the throne and to make him Shah in his stead."

And Rustem comforted Isfendiyar, and promised to do even as he desired. Then the dying hero sent messages to his father reproaching him for his evil intentions, and telling him that his wicked designs had been accomplished. " I die," said he, " the hapless victim of a father's hate."

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEATH OF RUSTEM

NOW there was among the younger sons of Zal a certain one named Shughad, a handsome youth, but one whose heart was evil. From the day of his birth it was foretold that he should do hurt to the house of his father, and bring the race of Sahm to sorrow.

This prophecy quickly became known throughout the province of Seistan, and caused great grief to all the people of the land. Zal prayed earnestly that the prediction should not be fulfilled and every care and attention was lavished upon the child for, said Zal, the Almighty Power might free him from the destiny foretold.

Some years passed and the child having grown into a young man was sent to the court of the king of Kabul who paid yearly tribute to Rustem, and in due course he married this king's daughter.

Every year Rustem journeyed to Kabul to receive the tribute due, but at last the king became dissatisfied, and began to entertain the hope that one day he might free his kingdom from the tax laid upon it. At length he talked of this to Shughad whom he found very ready to listen to anything against Rustem. "He is nought to me," he said, "always does he treat me as an enemy rather than a brother."

The king was overjoyed to find his son-in-law in this frame of mind and he artfully led him on to lay bare the hatred in his heart. It was evident that Shughad was ready to go to any lengths, and at last he declared his willingness to slay Rustem.

"But how," inquired the king, "couldst thou compass that end?"

"I have well pondered the matter," replied Shughad, "and I will attempt to accomplish my purpose in this manner. I will pretend that thou hast insulted and injured me and I will carry my complaint to Zal and Rustem and will urge them to march against thee. In the meantime thou must prepare for a hunting expedition, and in the way that thou shalt ride thy servants must dig, here and there, pits large enough and deep enough to hold a horse and his rider. In these pits they must place swords and spears with their points and edges upwards, and then the tops must be carefully covered over with boughs and earth. When this has been done Rustem must be conducted along the route, and he will certainly fall into one of the pits and will be impaled by the weapons hidden there."

This fiendish scheme was highly approved by the king, and it was arranged that a royal banquet should be given at which Shughad should use high words to the king, who would reply indignantly before the assembled guests.

Accordingly during the banquet Shughad addressed the king disrespectfully, whereupon the latter said with an appearance of great anger: "Thou upstart fellow, thou pretendest to be of the race of Sahm, but Zal disowns thee, and Rustem declares that thou art no better than a slave."

At these insulting words Shughad started up as though deeply enraged, and hurrying from the banquet-hall, he

hastily left the city and proceeded to Seistan where he was received by Rustem with every mark of affection.

When the Champion heard of the king of Kabul's insulting behaviour, he was exceedingly indignant and vowed that he would exact reparation, declaring that he would depose the king for his insolence to a member of his family, and place Shughad upon the vacant throne.

News of Rustem's resolve was quickly borne to Kabul, and when the Champion arrived in sight of the city he was met by the king, who came humbly, with naked feet, to beg forgiveness. Rustem's extreme anger had had time to cool and so he was induced to look over the offence which he had sworn to punish. In return the king honoured him with every mark of respect; and after entertaining him at a splendid banquet, he proposed that they should go a-hunting.

Always a lover of the chase the old man made him ready and rode forth upon Rakush, and Shughad ran beside and pointed out the way that he should go. But as he rode along, Rakush stopped suddenly, for he smelt the new-turned soil; and nothing would induce him to advance. At last Rustem grew angry and for the first time in his life he struck the noble creature with a whip. At this the heart of Rakush swelled with grief and shame, and in obedience to the blow he bounded forward and landing full upon the top of a hole fell crashing upon the sharp weapons underneath.

It was a deep, dark, and perilous trap, all bristling with sharp swords, which left no chance of escape from their cruel points, and horse and rider sinking in the midst received many a cruel wound. Yet even from that awful depth it was fated that Rustem should escape, for with a bound such as had never before been made by mortal steed,

Rakush suddenly sprung from the pit bearing his rider safely to the solid ground.

Alas! the effort was in vain, for the next moment horse and rider were once more entrapped, and although Rakush rose again to the surface, the ground was honeycombed with the cruel pits, and again and again was the noble horse ensnared, each time becoming weaker from the dreadful wounds which he received. Still he struggled on, trusting to save his dear master, who also had been pierced by many cruel points.

At last, when the gallant steed had for the sixth time scrambled triumphantly from a pit, he stumbled wearily into yet another, and with all his efforts he could do no more than place his fore-feet upon the edge, and there, all covered with deep wounds, he lay exhausted. Rustem, too, was spent, and as his life's blood ebbed slowly away it became clear to him that the wretched Shughad was the author of this treachery. With weak voice he summoned him to come close.

"Thou, my brother," said he, "why hast thou done me this wrong? Was it the part of a brother, my father's son, to work this ruin, to destroy my life?"

Then answered Shughad; "The blood that thou hast shed has long time cried aloud for vengeance. Blame not the instrument of fate, thy time had come!"

The sight of the mighty protector of the Persian kings lying so sorely stricken awoke more kindly feelings in the heart of the king of Kabul, and looking with pity upon the fallen hero, he said: "Alas the day! that thou shouldst perish so miserably in my kingdom. But still is there hope! Bring hither the matchless balm for Rustem's cure. The Champion of Persia must not die!"

But Rustem scorned the pity of the king and answered

proudly, "Many a monarch has died by my triumphant hand and still is my spirit unconquerable. For thy treachery Feramurz will exact a terrible reckoning when he comes hither with a mighty host to seek for Rustem." Then turning to Shughad he said, with altered voice, "My race is run, and now must I prepare to pass into the realms of night. But let my feeble hands, I pray thee, grasp my bow, that even in death the wolves aud vultures may not venture to tear my body."

With a smile of fiendish satisfaction the craven wretch reached forward the strong bow to the dying hero, and Rustem snatched at it so eagerly that Shughad fled in terror, and was not satisfied until he reached the shelter of a large tree which grew near. Well might he be afraid! For one instant strength returned to the arm of Rustem, and gathering all his dying energies into one mighty effort, he drew the bow to its utmost limit and the arrow sped with such force that it pierced the trunk of the tree, and transfixed the heart of him who had so lately rejoiced in the success of his cruel and wicked schemes.

Thus the hour of death afforded a gleam of joy to Rustem, and lifting his eyes upward he exclaimed "Thanks unto thee, O thou great Creator, for the power to avenge my death upon my murderer!"

With these words a great silence fell upon the scene, and all men hushed their breath while the lion of Persia waited for the dread messenger. At length the king drew near to the spot where his great enemy reclined and, lo! he lay in the stillness and majesty of death.

The news of the death of Rustem was borne to Zal by one who had ridden to Kabul in the train of the hero,

and the old man tore his grey locks and rent his garments in the agony of despair. " Why, Oh why, did I not die for thee, Rustem, my son ! " he cried.

When the first bitterness of grief had passed Zal despatched Feramurz with a large force to Kabul, and when the king learned of this he fled with his people to the mountains. Then Feramurz laid waste the country and having found the remains of Rustem, the mournful procession returned to Seistan, where, amidst the lamentations of the people, the bones of the hero were laid to rest in a massive tomb carved out of the everlasting rocks.

PRONOUNCING LIST OF NAMES

Afrasiab, Af-rau'-si-aub
Akwan, Ak'-waun
Arjasp, Ar'-jausp
Arzang, Ar'-tsang
Aulad, Ow'-lad

Bahram, Bar'-raum
Barzu, Bar'-tsoo
Bezad, Be'-tsaud
Byzun, By'-tsun

Cabul, Ca-bool
Chin, Cheen

Elburz, El'-burz

Feramurz, Fer'-au-murz
Ferangis, Fer-ang'-ees
Feridoon, Fer'-i-doon
Firoud, Fer-ood
Friburz, Fre'-burz

Gersiwaz, Ger-se'-waz
Gew, Gu
Girgin, Gir-geen
Gudarz, Goo-darz
Gurdafrid, Gurd'-a-freed
Gurzam, Gur'-zam
Gushtasp, Gush'-tausp

Hamaveran, Hau-mau'-veraun
Hujir, Hu-jeer
Human, Hoo'-maun
Husheng, Hoo'-sheng

Iblis, Ib'-lees
Iran, Ir-aun
Iredi, I-red'-y
Isfendiyar, Is-fand'-i-yaur

Jemshid, Jem-sheed

Kaiumers, Ki-oom'-ers
Kamus, Kau-moos
Kavah, Kav-ah
Kai Kaoos, Ki-kau'-oos
Kai Khosroo, Ki-kos'-roo
Kai Kobad, Ki-ko'-baud
Kalahur, Kau-la-hoor'
Kelad, Kee'-lad
Kerugsar, Ke-rug'-sar
Khaver, Kar'-ver
Khakan, Kar-kaun
Kitabun, Kit-a-boon
Kushan, Ku-shaun

Lohurasp, Loh'-rausp

Manijeh, Man'-ee-jeh
Mazinderan, Mazin-der'aun
Mihrab, Meer'-ab
Minuchir, Min'-oo-chir
Mirtas, Mirt'-as

Nauder, Naud'-er

Peran-Wisa, Peer-aun-we'-sah
Pilsam, Peel'-sam
Pilsen, Pil'-sen
Pulad, Pool'-ad

Rakush, Rak'-ush
Reham, Re-haum
Rivniz, Riv'-niz

Roum, Room
Rudabeh, Rood'-au-beh
Rustem, Rust'-em

Saiawush, Se'-ya-wash
Sahm, Sahm
Saru, Sa-roo
Seistan, Sees'-taun
Selim, Se'-lim
Shughad, Shug'-had
Shydah, Shy'-dah
Simurgh, Se-moorg
Sohrab, Soh-raub
Sudaveh, Soo-dau'-veh
Susen, Su-sen. Soo'-sen

Tahumers, Tah'-oo-mers
Tamineh, Tah-meen'-eh
Tur, Toor
Turan, Toor-aun
Tus, Toos

Yemen, Ye'-men

Zal, Zaul
Zohak, Zoh'-auk

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